

Mindfulness in Chan Monastic Life

Two Case Studies of Chung Tai Chan Monastery
and Yunmen Dajue Chan Monastery

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Ya-Chu Lee (Jiancheng Shi)

List of Abbreviations

CBETA CBETA Chinese Electronic Tripitaka Collection (Online Reader),
Taipei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association.

All sutras cited in this dissertation are sourced from CBETA and
numbered according to the following specifications, e.g.

T48n2008.p349a17-21 ('T' for number of the book, 'n' for number of
the volume, and 'p' for the page or pages, and 'a' for the paragraph
location in the database.)

Note on Romanisation and Transliteration

This dissertation uses the pinyin system of romanisation for all Chinese words, except the following: (1) place names that have well-known romanisations (such as 'Chung Tai' instead of 'Zhongtai') and (2) personal names that are known in their original spelling or in the preferred form of the individual (for example, 'Hsing-Yun', 'Wei-Chueh', and 'Yu-chen Li'). The titles of the books are based on the original sources and are either in simplified Chinese or traditional Chinese. All Chinese characters in this thesis, such as the names of sutras, books, temples, geographical locations, or people are given in the glossary at the end.

All of my informants in the dissertation are treated anonymously, except those who are happy to use their real names or those whose data, containing their names, are already public in the temple's publication.

Abstract

An extensive body of modern scholarly work on mindfulness has focused on early Buddhist texts. However, such an approach by itself cannot explicate how mindfulness is practised in the present-day lived reality of various Buddhist traditions in the Buddhist monastic community. Based on an investigation of contemporary monastic life in Mainland China and Taiwan, this dissertation proposes that mindfulness is seen in Chan tradition as both the means and the goal of the perfect enlightenment of one's true nature. As this implies, mindfulness is closely integrated into nearly every facet of Chan monastic life, as monks and nuns learn to unceasingly guard their minds against any unwholesomeness, and to dwell in the inherent tranquillity of the 'true mind', with the aim of attaining the state of *wunian*: the ultimate form of mindfulness.

This ethnographic study is based on the author's experience of living as a monastic in Chung Tai Chan Monastery in Taiwan between 2002 and 2012, and fieldwork data collected between 2015 and 2019 in Yunmen Dajue Chan Monastery in Mainland China. The thesis aims to establish that mindfulness is not a specific 'exercise', and that the phrase 'mindfulness practice' (*zhengnian lianxi*) is a misnomer in the lived context of these Chan monasteries. Rather, mindfulness is embedded in a broad array of these institutions' moral rules, religious rituals, meditation practices, physical labour, and interpersonal interactions.

It goes on to argue that the cultivation of mindfulness in these monastic settings is grounded in interpersonal webs of support, especially through two dynamics: living with and observing charismatic Chan masters, and mutual monitoring by peers. This reflects that mindfulness is not a practice that involves one's inner mental progress alone, but is also supported and fostered by the awareness of and care for the mindfulness of others who share the monastic environment.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Beginning the journey in the mist: Searching for *zhengnian*

As Harold Lloyd Goodall Jr. once noted, ‘you don’t choose to do [ethnography ...] it chooses *you*.’¹ I first learned about *zhengnian* (right mindfulness, Pali: sammā-sati, Skt: samyak-smṛti) in Taiwan in 1998, during a *chanqi* (Chan meditation retreat) held at a simple meditation hall next to the building site of Chung Tai Chan Monastery. Four years later, aged 20, having studied Chan Buddhism under Master Ven. Wei-Chueh for eight years, I was ordained and became his 1,062nd nun disciple at Chung Tai.² I never suspected that one day I would be in the UK pursuing doctoral research on mindfulness in contemporary monastic practices in Chan Buddhism, based on my personal experience during those ten years.

Upon arriving in the UK in 2013, I enrolled in an MA programme in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. While working towards my MA, I became aware of the popularity of the mindfulness movement in the West, and conducted an empirical study of the intersection between mindfulness and teachers’ reflective practice in the UK as the central focus of my dissertation. When I was invited to publish this dissertation in a journal, however, the editor asked me to amend my definition of ‘mindfulness’ to meet the expectations of her Western readers.³ Puzzled by this request, I began exploring discrepancies in the notions of mindfulness that prevailed in the West and the East, and came to the conclusion that the heated debates on ‘right/wrong mindfulness’ have rarely examined actual monastic practices in Chan monasteries.⁴ My bewilderment with growing curiosity motivated me to search for evidence of

¹ Goodall (2000, 9).

² While living there between 2002 and 2012, I often heard the phrase *jianzhu zhengnian suishun juexing* (to abide firmly in right mindfulness and follow the nature of awareness) – a slogan created by Ven. Wei-Chueh, the founder of Chung Tai. Such rhetoric is widely seen in the discourse of Chung Tai. For example, Chung Tai’s branch in Los Angeles reminded their followers to face the sad news about the passing of Ven. Wei-Chueh with the spirit of right mindfulness (Middle Land Chan Monastery 2016).

³ Lee (2016).

⁴ Right mindfulness refers to the traditional Buddhist concept of mindfulness, one of the pillars of the Eightfold Path. ‘Wrong’ mindfulness has been brought up by several scholars to discuss contemporary secular mindfulness, which derails from Buddhist ethical frameworks. Bhikkhu Anālayo (2016) highlights that the

how it was understood and practised in the context of my home monastery.

In 2015, during the summer of my first year as a Ph.D. student, I travelled to Hong Kong to attend a conference, whose organiser arranged a tour of several historic Chan monasteries in the Guangdong Province for the participants. On it, we visited the temples such as Liuzu Si, Guangxiao Si, Nanhua Si, and Guoen Si: the sites where the sixth patriarch of Chan Buddhism, Huineng (638-713), hid for fifteen years, was ordained, preached, and died. This was my first visit to Mainland China, and was indeed eye-opening, particularly with regard to the similarities and differences between the *chansi* (Chan monasteries) there and which I lived in Taiwan. I was simultaneously amazed by the many common cross-Strait patterns and continuities in the Chinese Chan monastic tradition, and baffled by the differences, including the question of why such divergence had occurred in the first place.

More specifically, the diverse practices I noticed among *chansi* could be described as falling along a spectrum. At one extreme, some monastics no longer exclusively preserved the Chan practice, and engaged in a mixture of cultivation practices infused with the Tibetan tradition, Vipassana meditation, and even innovative and alternative spiritual practices.⁵ At the other end, there are some who uphold traditional Chan practices, despite the suppression thereof during Mainland China's Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. The efforts to revive Chan practices were particularly striking at Yunmen Dajue Chansi (Yunmen Monastery) in the Guangdong Province. There, we participated in a dining ritual in which, at 11 a.m., hundreds of resident monks maintained complete silence as they ate food grown on their own farm. Elsewhere on the temple premises, I noticed that two memorial halls popular among

distinction between right and wrong types of mindfulness lies in whether its operation accords with the principle of the Four Noble Truths. Also, Lindahal (2015:59) argues that contemporary secular mindfulness might not be 'right' in the eyes of 'normative Buddhism', but its adaptation is seen as necessary to avoid entanglement with religion. According to Monteiro, Musten and Compson (2015, 6), wrong mindfulness is the lack of Buddhist ethical actions.

⁵ My observation resonates with Lau's (2017, 130) fieldwork in Mainland China. She noticed that 'Han Chinese Buddhist monasteries have taken significant roles in "transplanting" Theravāda meditation in China'.

visitors were dedicated to the Chan masters Ven. Xuyun (1840?-1959) and Ven. Foyuan (1922-2009); and along one corridor, a carved stone wall displayed the portraits of ancient Chan masters of the Yunmen School and their famous dharma words.⁶ The aura of serenity and the sense of history that enveloped this temple made it clear that Chan practices were still alive, despite the destruction wrought since the nineteenth century.⁷

Yunmen Monastery has had a close relationship with my own Buddhist lineage. Ven. Xuyun, who initially restored Yunmen between 1943 and 1951, was the teacher of Ven. Lingyuan (1902-1988),⁸ who was the teacher of my own monk teacher, Ven. Wei-Chueh (1928-2016). In this respect, Yunmen in Mainland China and Chung Tai Chan Monastery in Taiwan are connected through Ven. Xuyun. Many parallels and contrasts between these two sites could be observed: in the forms of ordination transmission, *chanqi* (Chan meditation), communal practices, and other aspects of everyday life. This prompted me to question whether Yunmen's and Chung Tai's respective understandings and practices of mindfulness were similar or different from each other, especially given that Ven. Lingyuan brought the Chan lineage from Ven. Xuyun in Mainland China to Taiwan and passed it down to Ven. Wei-Chueh, thus literally embodying the transfer of Chinese Chan tradition from Mainland China to Taiwan.

As Eifring has pointed out, every human activity is closely intertwined with its surrounding culture;⁹ so it is worth asking what aspects of the Chan tradition were kept, adapted, and lost when it was transmitted to Taiwan's quite different social, cultural, and political context. My hope was that comparison of two monasteries – geographically and culturally

⁶ Yunmen school is one of the five major schools of Chan Buddhism and was established by Chan Master Wenyan (862/864-949). It was absorbed into the Linji school at the end of the Song dynasty, and its lineage was continued by Ven. Xuyun in modern time as the twelfth generation of heirs (Cen 2014). For more details about Chan Master Wenyan, see App (2018), App (1994), and App (1989).

⁷ Welch (1967, 47) made a similar comment on Chinese Chan Buddhism, which was destroyed yet still alive by 1950s.

⁸ He was born in Zhejiang Province, China, and was fully ordained at Yongquan Monastery by Ven. Xuyun in 1933. In 1953, he was invited to spread dharma in Taiwan and founded Shoufang Dajue Chan Monastery in Keelung, Taiwan.

⁹ Eifring (2015).

separated, but sharing the same religious lineage – would provide me with a much deeper understanding of mindfulness practices and ideas, and how they have been localised and otherwise adapted to such different contexts.

1.2 Research aims

The main objective of my research is to explore how mindfulness is practised in contemporary Chan monastic life, via a cross-Strait ethnographic study of two Chan monastic communities: Chung Tai in Taiwan, and Yunmen in Mainland China. For the purposes hereof, I will deal with ‘mindfulness’ in the sense of right mindfulness in this dissertation, which is translated as *zhengnian* in Chinese or *samyak-smṛti* in Sanskrit – the seventh element in the Noble Eightfold Path.¹⁰ According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, the eight components of this path are like ‘the intertwining strands of a single cable’, existing concurrently and supporting one another.¹¹ More specifically, the practice of each component is revealed and manifested in the interconnections among all eight. However, it is worth noting that the concept of *zhengnian* is strongly emphasised in Chung Tai’s discourse, and serves as a useful guideline for Chan practitioners embarking on the path towards enlightenment by paying attention to guarding and protecting their mind. Thus, ‘mindfulness’ offers scholars an important perspective on the core practice in Chan monastic life, as well as how its main principles are applied in a broad sense.

Crucially, current scholarship on mindfulness is primarily focused on doctrine and theory: that is, determining *what* mindfulness is, as documented textually. Thus, *how* the teaching of mindfulness has been practised by diverse adherents of the Buddha remains relatively under-researched. I would argue that, in the absence of such research, we cannot attain a deep understanding of the meaning and significance of mindfulness. This study’s

¹⁰ Kuan (2008) points out that there are several translations for *sati* (*smṛti*), such as conscience, attention, meditation, contemplation, and insight. Jaini (1992) also proposes that *sati* (*smṛti*) is intrinsically referred to right mindfulness as it can only occur in good consciousness.

¹¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (2006, 14).

originality aims to fill this gap in scholarly understanding, by illustrating how mindfulness operates vis-à-vis the lived reality of monastics who, at least in theory, have devoted their whole lives to it. Its ethnographic approach to modern expressions of monastic training in mindfulness passed down the generations in the Chinese Chan Buddhist tradition represents a wholly new departure for the academic literature on mindfulness, which can reasonably be expected to offer fresh perspectives, make original contributions to knowledge, and open new avenues of scholarly enquiry.

This research has been guided by three main questions: (1) How is mindfulness taught and transmitted in the context of contemporary Chan monasteries? (2) How are practitioners trained in mindfulness in their day-to-day monastic lives? And (3) Within the same Buddhist lineage, what are the commonalities and divergences in how mindfulness is cultivated between Taiwan and Mainland China?

1.3 Conceptual framework

My research on methods of teaching and training Chan monastics in mindfulness takes account of the multifaced nature of interpersonal interaction within Chan monasteries, including master-disciple relationships and peer relationships. This approach is expected to yield important new insights into how mindfulness is practised as part of a living tradition.

The most important focus of Chan Buddhism is mind-to-mind transmission. This highlights each practitioner's dual role as both a transmitter and a receiver of traditional knowledge. There is a further communal form of spiritual cultivation in Chan monastic life, which stresses that, to achieve liberation, human relationships must be harmonious and governed by disciplinary rules. Thus, key distinctions between secular mindfulness practices and the mindfulness training in Chan monasteries are likely to reside in the manner of both knowledge acquisition and transmission.

Kabat-Zinn has carefully delineated the dynamics of the interchanges between Chan-

school practitioners and the members of his contemporary mindfulness-based stress-reduction (MBSR) programme:

The emphasis in Chan on direct transmission outside the sutra or orthodox teaching (Luk 1974) also reinforced the sense that what is involved in mindfulness practice is ultimately not merely a matter of the intellect or cognition or scholarship, but of direct authentic full-spectrum first-person experience, nurtured, catalysed, reinforced and guided by the second-person perspective of a well-trained and highly experienced and empathic teacher. Therefore, MBSR was grounded in a non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical perspective that allowed for clarity, understanding, and wisdom, what we might call essential dharma, to emerge in the interchanges between instructor and participants, and within the meditation practice of the participant as guided by the instructor.¹²

In any Chan monastery, the monastics live with their teachers in a communal environment, under their direct observation, where they receive personal training and learn via methods passed down from generation to generation. The connection between a Chan master and his disciple is so close that it often develops into a lifetime bond of trust, which can be expected to transform into a strong faith that supports the student in his/her journey towards enlightenment. The relationship between the instructor and the participants in secular mindfulness programmes is rather different. People might join a workshop for a day or a week and meet up with their mindfulness tutors and classmates only for very limited periods, or could even learn the secular style of mindfulness from mobile apps or online.¹³ These types of contact appear unlikely to develop into a long-term relationship, let alone full supervision of every aspect of one's life by an experienced instructor. Indeed, it is not even generally possible for secular students to witness how their tutors put mindfulness into practice in their own lives, and thus to judge the extent to which their teachings actually 'work'. Thus, it is highly doubtful that a meditation instructor in a secular mindfulness group will have the same kind of powerful effect a Chan master tends to have on his students: motivating and influencing them in every aspect of their practice. However, all of this must remain speculative amid the near-absence of

¹² Kabat-Zinn (2011, 292).

¹³ For example, Headspace and The Mindfulness App.

ethnographic research on mindfulness in the lived reality of Chan monasteries, a problem that this dissertation addresses.

1.4 Literature review

The increasingly popular Western mindfulness-based interventions and other phenomena that have generally been lumped together under the term ‘mindfulness movement’ have been described as ‘a confluence of two powerful and potentially synergistic epistemologies.’¹⁴ The wave of ‘mindfulness movement’ here is mainly related to the rapid growth of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, established by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979, and a series of relevant mindfulness-based interventions afterwards. Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as ‘the heart of Buddhism’ and defines it as ‘paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally’.¹⁵ He claims that his mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are informed by and connected with the universal dharma of Buddhism and are recontextualisation of its essence.¹⁶

The notion of an ongoing ‘mindful revolution’,¹⁷ in particular, illustrates the challenges of cultivating human beings’ innate mental capacity by reconciling the essence of traditional Eastern Buddhist teachings and Western clinical theories and approaches. Many scholars have noted the considerable differences in how mindfulness is cultivated and practised between current Western and traditional Buddhist contexts.¹⁸ As Harrington and Dunne note, ‘A lot of the criticism has focused on the degree to which MBSR is really Buddhist and whether, if so, it is a valid or respectable interpretation of the tradition.’¹⁹ More specifically, some have rung

¹⁴ Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2013, 1).

¹⁵ Kabat-Zinn (2003, 145).

¹⁶ Kabat-Zinn (2011, 290).

¹⁷ The term appears in the Time Magazine to describe the the popularity of mindfulness in the West (Pickert, accessed July 22, 2020). According to Purser (2019:13), ‘Mindfulness is now said to be a \$4 billion industry, propped up by media hype and slick marketing by the movement’s elites. More than 100,000 books for sale on Amazon have a variant of “mindfulness” in their title.’

¹⁸ See, among others, Bhikkhu Bodhi (2011), Chiesa (2013), and Khong (2009).

¹⁹ Harrington and Dunne (2015, 629).

alarm bells over the proliferation of secular mindfulness interventions, on the grounds that Buddhist ethical and epistemological teachings are often obscured or lost when mindfulness is marketed in secular settings.²⁰ Dylan and Coates, for example, warned of the risk that ‘when mindfulness is applied so broadly [...] its meaning, or defining characteristics, becomes diffused.’²¹ Purser, meanwhile, has highlighted how far secular mindfulness programmes have diverged from Buddhist teachings, to the point that the former are

nothing more than basic concentration trainings. Although derived from Buddhism, [mindfulness has ...] been stripped of the teachings on ethics that accompanied it, as well as the liberating aim of dissolving attachment to a false sense of self.²²

In his view, the widely known secular version of mindfulness exemplified by Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR has been commodified and sold as ‘a capitalist spirituality’ to fulfil the needs of ‘I, me, and mine’.²³ Such critiques are integral to an ongoing debate about the meaning and practice of mindfulness, centred on the potential risk of ‘denaturing’ Buddhist teachings about mindfulness via processes of de-contextualisation and/or re-contextualisation, especially though not exclusively in Western clinical settings.

In response to the surging popularity of secular mindfulness interventions, the majority of research on mindfulness by scholars of Buddhism have focused on the theoretical basis and original meaning of mindfulness as expressed in the Buddhist canon, chiefly the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.²⁴ For example, Bhikkhu Anālayo conducted a comprehensive study of the exposition and practice of mindfulness in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,²⁵ while Bhikkhu Bodhi and Rupert Gethin revisited the traditional teaching of mindfulness in the Pali Canon.²⁶ However, as briefly

²⁰ See, among others, Monteiro et al. (2015), Rosenbaum and Magid (2016), and Sun (2014).

²¹ Dylan and Coates (2016).

²² Purser (2019, 13).

²³ Purser (2019, 10-22).

²⁴ *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is widely popular in Theravāda Buddhism and introduces the practice of mindfulness on the path to Buddhist enlightenment. In the Pali Canon, the sutra is the tenth discourse in the *Majjhima Nikaya*. For details about the sutra, see Bhikkhu Anālayo (2003). It corresponds to *Nianchujing* (T01n0026.p582b07-584c1) in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism.

²⁵ Bhikkhu Anālayo (2003).

²⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi (2011); Gethin (2011).

noted above, the experiential level of *how* mindfulness is performed and practised in the lived reality of Buddhist tradition is rarely explored. One important exception to that rule is an ethnographic study by Cassaniti, which offers an account of how mindfulness is reflected in the everyday lives of people in Theravāda Buddhist countries.²⁷ Specifically, it suggests that ‘mindfulness is not considered to be a trendy new idea [...] [F]or most people in Thailand, mindfulness is considered less of a stand-alone, but a religious concept that is an integrated part of a large complex of Buddhist teachings.’ As such, Cassaniti’s research highlights the importance of understanding mindfulness’s deep-rootedness in traditional Buddhist societies, in sharp contrast to its status as a trendy new ‘fast-food therapy’ emerging in the capitalist West. Her work also shows that studying mindfulness in cross-cultural perspective can tie it to broader socio-religious contexts and help scholars to avoid the trap of treating it as an isolated, de-contextualised topic.

Kabat-Zinn is reported to have told a Chinese audience that ‘mindfulness runs in the blood of Chinese people and is engraved in the bones of Chinese’,²⁸ and that his understanding of mindfulness was ‘grounded in what the Zen tradition refers to as the one-thousand-year view.’²⁹ Rosenbaum and Magid, for example, merely stating that mindfulness is ‘most intimately associated with the Theravada or Vipassana traditions, mindfulness also plays an important role in Zen (though often in subtly different forms).’³⁰ In my personal experience, mindfulness is inherently related to Chan monastic practices, but ethnographic research on mindfulness in Chinese Chan tradition has been relatively rare.

Textually based studies of Chan Buddhist mindfulness are somewhat more common. Robert Sharf, one of the leading scholars of Chan Buddhism, has explored this concept in the early Chan scriptures. However, his interpretations of it are frequently at odds with what I was

²⁷ Cassaniti (2018).

²⁸ WiseHeart (accessed October 17, 2019).

²⁹ Kabat-Zinn (2011, 281).

³⁰ Rosenbaum and Magid (2016, 3).

taught in a Chan monastery. For example, his translation of *wunian* as ‘no mindfulness’ seems to imply that *wunian* is conceptually opposed to mindfulness.³¹ To his credit, he admitted his confusion over the actual cultivation of *wunian*: calling it ‘no easy task’ to ascertain whether *wunian* texts were ‘mere rhetoric aimed at mitigating the reification of mind that attends notions of “mindfulness”, or if these texts were advocating an alternative method.’³²

In fact, far from being the absence or opposite of mindfulness, *wunian* is explained in Chan monasteries as the highest level of mindfulness one can achieve.³³ The two focal monasteries under the study regards that the ultimate state of practising mindfulness is to rest in one’s Buddha nature;³⁴ however, the relation between mindfulness and seeing one’s Buddha nature is rarely noticed in current scholarship. This view is also advanced by Feng Huanzhen (b. 1964), a scholar of Chinese Buddhism and a disciple of Ven. Foyuan of Yunmen. Feng echoes the point that *wunian* is often misrepresented and misunderstood in Buddhist scholarship.³⁵ As Buswell has warned, ‘without access to Zen’s monastic life – the context within which that thought evolved – much of the import of Zen beliefs and trainings may never be known, or at least may be prone to misinterpretation.’³⁶ Such concerns highlight the absence of insiders’ voices from within the tradition, and suggests the need for a more credible understanding of teaching in monasteries, as well as how mindfulness is practised by experienced Chan masters while training their disciples.

The scholarly approach to the ‘mind’ when conducting research, both historically and as it exists today, may present a stark contrast to the monastic insiders’ perspective on the ‘mind’, who practice in the Chinese Chan tradition. Sharf, for instance, seems to hold the view

³¹ Sharf (2014, 945).

³² Sharf (ibid).

³³ The data derives from my conversation with abbot of Yunmen monastery in 2016, my interview with the abbot of Lirong monastery in 2018, and my personal learning at Chung Tai.

³⁴ For example, see Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 22, 2020) and Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed May 28, 2020).

³⁵ Feng (2002).

³⁶ Buswell (1992).

that the traditions of today are of little help in reconstructing early meditative Chan practices in the following paragraph; the ‘Chan, Zen, Sōn, and Thiên traditions that survive today are of little help in reconstructing early Chan meditative practices [...]. In short, contemporary Asian practices cannot be used, in any simple way, as a window onto early Chan.’³⁷. However, to understand contemporary mindfulness training and learning experiences in the Chinese Chan tradition, it is relevant to firstly examine the viewpoints of practicing monastic members in both of these focal monasteries. For the monastics in the study, mindfulness is practised among eating, walking, working, and sleeping. It is crucial for them to perform each detail of daily work wholeheartedly by following *vinaya* rules and communal regulations. Their attentions are placed on how to prevent the intrusion of unwholesome thoughts and how to dwell in one’s ‘true mind’ as their ultimate goal.

They believe that the Chan meditative tradition as it exists today inherits and preserves the ‘original spirit’ of pursuing a lifestyle of no delusion that connects them to the teachings passed down in the lineage by many generations of Chan masters. For them, practising mindfulness ‘correctly’ inevitably involves imitation of early Chan masters’ meditative methods and other practices. It is further worth noting that this imitative aspect of modern devotees’ practices is omnipresent: being embedded in the logical structure of their learning experiences – notably including mindfulness training – in today’s monasteries. In fact, contemporary monastics in the Chan tradition seek out details of ancient Chan meditative practices and use them as their fundamental guides. Thus, examining the monastic insiders’ viewpoints about their practices is essential in gaining a rounded understanding of the meaning of mindfulness in the Chinese Chan tradition.

As well as helping to fill that particular gap, the present study answers Yang and Huang’s call for more ethnographic studies of the practice of *xiuxing* (spiritual cultivation)

³⁷ Sharf (2014, 933-34).

through ‘close’ participant observation.³⁸ Through delving into the practices of religious communities by observing and engaging in their daily activities, and even simply ‘hanging out’ with their members, it is possible to gain a better understanding of how religious faith is actually practised in the social and cultural worlds of others. Being a nun myself, I find myself in a rare, advantageous position: potentially able to bridge the gulfs both between canonical texts and actual practices, and among disparate academic specialisms. Hence, my research aims to explore and demonstrate an insider’s perspective on mindfulness training in Chan Buddhism. Kabat-Zinn has acknowledged the value of monastic experience to cultivation of the mind, in the following terms:

Over the centuries, the universal inborn capacity we all have for exquisitely fine-tuned awareness and insight has been explored, mapped, preserved, developed, and refined – not so much anymore by prehistory’s hunting-and-gathering societies [...] but rather in monasteries [...]. At their best, these monasteries were veritable laboratories for investigating the mind, and the monastics who populated them and continue to do so to this day used themselves as both the scientists and the object of study.³⁹

I hope to contribute to Buddhist scholarship in this type of meaningful way.

My study also echoes Arai’s stance on the significance of interpersonal relationships among monastics, as reflected in her study of Japanese Soto Zen nuns. As Arai put it, these nuns’ disciplining of their human relationships ‘is the foundation of their Zen monastic life [...] both the most difficult aspect of the practice and the dimension that yields the greatest transformation.’⁴⁰ However, in contrast to her study site, a small community in which nuns’ interactions are mainly with their female peers, Chung Tai is a large mixed-sex *samgha* community with branches in many parts of the world. Therefore, my study will showcase a far more complex set of human relationships.

It is noteworthy that issues of gender equality in Buddhism are the focus of a growing

³⁸ Yang and Huang (2017).

³⁹ Kabat-Zinn (2005).

⁴⁰ Arai (1999).

subfield of Buddhist scholarship. Over the past fifteen years in particular, feminist Buddhists and Buddhist scholars have been engaged in the ongoing debate on the roles of women in Buddhist traditions.⁴¹ However, my focus here is not on questions of gender justice or discrimination in the context of Chan Buddhist monasteries,⁴² but rather to examine the lived reality of how monks and nuns' relate to one another and how they operate based on their gender identity. In particular, I am interested to explore how mindfulness is involved in the process of opposite-gender interaction. Part of the rationale for this approach is that current scholarly narratives on gender have been dominated by the experiences of Buddhist nuns who are the majority in Taiwan,⁴³ whilst the lives and spiritual practices of monks have been under-represented. I hope that this study exploring the interrelationship of mindfulness, the ultimate path, and gender in Buddhist institutions, will help to redress some of this imbalance.

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Case-study approach

Siebeck has stated that doing comparison is a fundamental human intellectual capability, which allows us to shed light on new perspectives and unrecognised zones within familiar materials.⁴⁴ In this study, I explore a number of parallels comparatively and divergences in the ways that mindfulness is perceived and practised by Chan monastics in Taiwan and Mainland China. The idea of choosing two Chan monasteries, one in Taiwan and the other across the Taiwan Strait in Mainland China, was inspired by the Chinese sculptural genre of the double-sitting Buddha, which portrays past and present Buddhas preaching the same dharma together.

⁴⁵ As well as being a useful metaphor for Buddhist propagation across historical time and

⁴¹ Tsomo (2004).

⁴² For more on gender equality/inequality, see for example Dewaraja (1994), Bhikkhu Anālayo (2014), and Ajahn Brahm (2014).

⁴³ Buddhist nuns in Taiwan have attracted scholarly interests and attention in recent decades mainly due to their boasting numbers, higher-education background, and famous female leadership.

⁴⁴ Siebeck (2012).

⁴⁵ The art form is inspired by the *Lotus Sutra*, which describes both Gautama Buddha and Prabhûtaratna Buddha

geographic space, choosing to study a historic monastery in Mainland China and a modern monastery in Taiwan offers a matrix for examining how dharma as it related to mindfulness has been lived and practised in the Chinese monastic environment.⁴⁶

The two monasteries I selected for my study represent a single historical thread, insofar as both their lineages can be traced back to Ven. Xuyun. Yunmen's dharma lineage is viewed as stretching back to the tenth century, which was restored by Ven. Xuyun in the twentieth century.⁴⁷ Chung Tai traces its lineage back to one of Ven. Xuyun's key disciples, Ven. Lingyuan, who brought the dharma lineage from mainland China to Taiwan. Despite a large temporal gap between of the establishment of these two monasteries, both identify themselves as authentic inheritors of the patriarchal tradition of Chinese Chan, and continue to strive to propagate the meditative methods invented by past Chan masters such as *chanqi* and *nongchan* on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Importantly, however, these monasteries have not had any tangible interactions with each other.⁴⁸

Smith employed the term 'proximate other' to highlight the greater tension that can occur in the comparison of two entities not because they are 'far' but because they are 'near'; i.e., because of their similarities rather than their differences.⁴⁹ In my opinion, the concept of 'proximate other' effectively captures the connectedness and the rivalry between Chan Buddhism in Taiwan and Mainland China that I have observed during fieldwork.⁵⁰ Guzman-

as preaching together on the seat in its 11th chapter (T09n262.p33c5-9).

⁴⁶ Unlike a traditional Chinese monastery spreading horizontally, Chung Tai was structured vertically to cope with limited land space of Taiwan. I heard Ven. Wei-Chueh saying that Chung Tai represented a new architectural style that adapts to the 21st century. In his view, Chinese traditional temple architecture with glazed tiles and pitched roofs would no longer serve as exclusive marks of Buddhist monasteries, since schools, incinerators, and even columbarium were built in the same style. His innovation was bold and also received some criticism. For example, see Jiang (2012, 116).

⁴⁷ Ven. Xuyun was the main figure who continued the dharma lineage of the five schools of Chan Buddhism into modern times.

⁴⁸ In 2016, monks from Yunmen monastery visited Chung Tai Chan Monastery briefly during their journey in Taiwan.

⁴⁹ Smith (1992).

⁵⁰ My Chinese informants often expressed interest in the latest developments in Buddhism in Taiwan, so there was a sense of comparison and even competition.

Carmeli has advanced the concept of the ‘semi-other’: ‘a shared identity that permits the crossing of symbolic boundaries and creates circles of inclusion, while at the same time reinforcing stereotypes and ignorance about the “other”’.⁵¹ The identities of my two focal two monasteries fit this description of semi-similarity and semi-difference. Their similarity lies in their constructed subjectivity, built on the imagination of a long history of Chan literature and other texts, which transcends the limited framework of any single dynasty from Chinese history, while also transgressing contemporary political boundaries. On the other hand, those same political boundaries are in some senses absolute, and thus, their identities remain starkly divided.⁵²

In this study, I employ the term ‘near-other’ to describe how I conceive of the relationship between these two monasteries. They may be near geographically, genealogically, and philosophically, and maintain very similar visions and narratives of the ultimate truth on the path of mindfulness. However, in terms of their actions – whether aimed at restoring and propagating historical Chan practices, engaging with the laity, organising and managing temples, and dealing with gender issues – they are profoundly shaped by sharply differing political regulations and social atmospheres. According to Smith, the study of ‘otherness’ is ultimately the study of the ‘self’, because ‘otherness’ exists relationally.⁵³ The differences between these two monasteries mirror each other, presenting both continuity and divergence in human action within the same tradition, rendering them both ‘near’ and ‘other’. Thus, each chapter in this dissertation analyses an aspect of their practices or monastic lifestyle in

⁵¹ Guzman-Carmeli (2020, 71).

⁵² The long-standing political confrontation between Taiwan and Mainland China has provoked competitiveness and various degrees of misunderstandings in the sphere of Buddhism as elsewhere. During my first fieldwork in 2016, I had a chat with a group of university students who were participating in Yunmen’s summer camp. Suddenly, one asked me seriously: ‘Do you regard yourself as Chinese?’ This question highlighted the whole group’s concerns about my ethno-religious identity as someone from Taiwan. Indeed, throughout my fieldwork, ‘Taiwan’ appeared to be a very sensitive term, treated almost like a taboo.⁵² I was often reminded by my Chinese monk informants to be very careful and not to mention the term ‘Taiwan’ when I stayed at Yunmen monastery. My Mainland informants referred to ‘Taiwan’ as *nabian* (‘over there’) rather than by its official name; in the same token, people in Taiwan refer to the Mainland as *duian* (‘the other side’).

⁵³ Smith (2004).

comparative perspective, to illuminate how Chan tradition is negotiated, transmitted, developed, and reinvented in the sharply differing socio-political contexts on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

As Bergh and Ketchen have noted, ‘by purposefully selecting information-rich cases, insight and in-depth understanding can be gained.’⁵⁴ I have selected two Chan monasteries with distinctive characteristics for their strong potential to enrich my research. Chung Tai Chan Monastery in Taiwan represents a worthy case for several reasons. First, it is regarded as one of the ‘Four Great Mountains’ in Taiwanese Buddhism,⁵⁵ and arguably has the largest number of monastic members of any Taiwanese Buddhist institution.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, it might be very difficult for outside scholars to gain access to it, due to its strict monastic rules.⁵⁷ Thus, whilst many scholars have devoted attention to Taiwan’s Buddhist nuns (e.g., Yu’s study on the Incense Light community, or DeVido’s study on the Ciji [Tzu Chi] community),⁵⁸ Chung Tai nuns have remained almost invisible, mentioned only fleetingly in the literature, despite being the largest group of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan. Information about their lives and training practices will thus be essential to filling voids in the study of both contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism and nuns in the Chan tradition.

Yu’s above-mentioned study of Incense Light nuns posed the following important questions about the study of contemporary communities of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan:

Traditionally, lay Buddhists followed masters of particular Buddhist schools [...]. But when the Incense Light community emphasizes neither Chinese Buddhist history nor Chinese Buddhist meditation traditions, can it be said to represent Chinese or Taiwanese Buddhism? [...] Can a community establish a distinctive identity if it keeps changing its meditative practices? [...]. Meditation, after all, has always been the very core of Buddhism and what

⁵⁴ Ketchen and Bergh (2006, 159).

⁵⁵ An extensive body of scholarly studies exists on the other three ‘mountains’ in Taiwan. For Foguangshan, see Chandler (2004, 2005); for Tzu Chi, see Ding (1999) and Huang (2009); for Fagushan, see Chen (2002).

⁵⁶ It has about 1600 monastic members of both genders. Yu suggests that Chung Tai has more monastic members than Foguangshan (Yu 2013, 26).

⁵⁷ Based on my observation, Chung Tai is very circumspect towards any outsider scholars as well as giving interviews.

⁵⁸ See DeVido (2010) and Yu (2013).

defines someone as a Buddhist.⁵⁹

In contrast to the case of the Incense Light community, Chung Tai has had a well-defined and distinctive identity within Chinese Buddhist patriarchal genealogy since its origin. More specifically, it has operated as a monastic-led institution aimed at preserving the orthodox Chan monastic tradition passed down by Ven. Xuyun; and its senior members have shown little interest in creating a new lineage, or adopting any non-Chinese meditation practices. Such an attitude contrasts starkly with its counterpart Dharma Drum, which in 2006 formed a new Chan lineage called Chunghwa (Chinese) Zen Dharma Drum Sect, that incorporates a mixture of Theravada Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism as well as yoga in India.⁶⁰

As Chung Tai's counterpart, I chose to study Yunmen Dajue Chan Monastery in Guangdong as a mirror of the 'near-other' in Chan Buddhism. It is a site considerable fame and historical significance.⁶¹ Two commemorative stone steles erected during the Southern Han period (917-971) remain there today, and offer precious clues about its heyday. However, after the Northern Song period (960-1127), it gradually declined; its lineage was discontinued, and the temple itself became buried in wild grass until Ven. Xuyun arrived and began his restoration work. Though there have been a large number of studies of its historic founder, Chan master Wenyan, and of its Chan teaching style, few scholars have taken an ethnographic approach to the lived monastic reality of this thousand-year-old institution. Nichols categorised Chinese Buddhist temples into three types: (1) those that function as heritage and tourism sites with rare or no religious cultivation, (2) those that is resided by a group of monastics and aimed at the

⁵⁹ Yu (*ibid.*, 213).

⁶⁰ About Chan methods, Master Sheng-Yen states, 'I took a different approach to teaching Chan in the West, [...] My approach is different from the approach used in China's Chan Halls [...] I have combined in my teaching this Chinese technique of fast walking with the Theravada practice of slow walking. I also use yoga from India and Taiji and massage from China in my teaching' (Ven. Sheng-Yen, accessed January 12, 2020). For the explanation of Chunghwa (Chinese) Zen Dharma Drum Sect, see Taiwan Religious Culture Map (accessed January 12, 2020).

⁶¹ Its original name was Guangtai Chanyuan (Peaceful Light Monastery), given by the king of the southern Han in 927. The monastery was renamed as Zhengzhen Chanyuan (Achieving Truth Monastery). In 963, the monastery was given its current name.

restoration of traditional monastic practices, (3) those that combine both these functions.⁶² Based on my observations, Yunmen is an excellent example of the second type: a Chan monastery that bridges the discontinuities of the Mao era, with the goal of restoring former traditional practices.



Figure 1 Location of the two Chan monasteries, Chung Tai and Yunmen.

Simply gaining access to a Chan monastery, let alone securing permission to conduct participant observation by living with its members, is difficult. Those who are admitted must observe its strict and complicated monastic rules and intense routines, not least intensive meditation retreats where one has to spend long hours in a cross-legged position. They must also deal with gender issues, monastic-lay identity boundaries, and cultural and linguistic barriers. This is all essential to the process, however. As DeVido has pointed out, little of value

⁶² Nichols (2019, 98-99).

will be gained ‘unless you live with a Buddhist community for an extended period and even then, nuns, like any person, may never reveal their real feelings and thoughts’.⁶³ This echoes my own experience that monastic informants are generally sceptical about the intentions of outsiders, and may not perceive the value of academic ethnography to Buddhism or to their Buddhist practice.

It is reasonable to assume that gaining access is easier in the case of *xiaomiao* (smaller temples), which are less institutionalised, than in the case of large and well-organised Chan monasteries whose strict rules regulate both visitors and volunteers. In the case of Chung Tai, for example, only the ground and first floors of the monastery and outdoor garden areas are open to the general public. When applying for a one-hour tour inside the monastery premises, visitors may be allowed onto its higher floors to visit the Buddhist halls; but they are nevertheless allowed only fleeting glimpses of the actual monastic lives of its members. Ceremonies, rituals, and events held at the monastery are open only to its lay followers, who must be registered with their local branches, and complete separate application forms for each visit in such contexts. Due in part to these various restrictions and rules, first-hand ethnographic data from Chung Tai is vanishingly rare. Even serious students of Buddhism may take years to gain sufficient trust from its members to conduct fieldwork inside it.

1.5.2 Autoethnography

I chose to be not an outside observer, gazing down upon the monastery as if from on high, but someone committed to the tradition.⁶⁴

My journey into Buddhism started at the age of 12, when I formally took the Three Refuges and became a lay disciple of Ven. Wei-Chueh. At that time, the main building of Chung Tai Chan Monastery was under construction, and its provisional buildings were all very small and modest. I attended ceremonial events and rituals there as an insider, and witnessed Chung

⁶³ DeVido (2010, 3).

⁶⁴ Buswell (2004).

Tai's rapid growth from a construction site to a grand religious complex; from having fewer than 30 branches in Taiwan to a total of 108 around world; and from a membership of few hundred monastics to around 1,600. One year after Chung Tai was officially inaugurated, I joined its *samgha* community, and in 2002 became a nun disciple of Ven. Wei-Chueh.

After eight years of practice as a lay member and then as a fully ordained Buddhist nun, I realised there was one other calling in my life that I needed to take on, and in 2012, made up my mind to pursue a higher degree overseas. Chung Tai respected my decision, but due to its strict regulations about granting members' requests for leave, I had to formally withdraw from the monastery.⁶⁵ On the day I left, Ven. Wei-Chueh told me that I was always welcome to come back. As I am not affiliated with Chung Tai currently, which is not sponsoring my overseas studies in any way; this freedom has helped me to establish complete neutrality in my research, free of any conflicts of interest that might otherwise have arisen from my duties as a monastic administrator. Notwithstanding this independence, however, I have written to Chung Tai on several occasions during my Ph.D. studies to inform them of my research plans and progress, and to express my gratitude for their past teaching.

Buswell, who conducted research on Korean Buddhist monks at a large monastery, spent five years living and training with them.⁶⁶ Similarly, the present study is based in part on my own experience of learning about Chan Buddhism through living with other monastics in a large monastery for a lengthy period. As such, my study is likely to differ from most other ethnographies, notably in terms of its methods of data collection, since I had not intended to 'conduct fieldwork' while I was living at Chung Tai. Much like Buswell, who 'went to Korea

⁶⁵ In the monastic life of Chung Tai, the concept of 'holiday', 'vacation', or 'weekend break' does not exist. Leaving the monastery usually requires a sound reason, and the leave is granted for a maximum of 36 hours. The procedure requires many signatures of approval from monks and nuns in positions of authority. It is believed that life outside the monastery could lead to lapse in discipline and failure in one's spiritual cultivation. If any monastic member wishes to live outside for over a month, they must formally sign an official form renouncing their membership.

⁶⁶ Buswell (1992).

not to study monks, but to live as a monk’,⁶⁷ I joined Chung Tai not to study nuns, but to live as a nun. Thus, most data for the Chung Tai element of this study has been drawn from my direct observations over a period of living for ten years as a Buddhist nun.⁶⁸ I was also an insider, at least initially, through being acquainted with the local language and religious jargon, and the monastery’s daily routines. In this respect, it seems relatively unlikely that I have misread or misinterpreted their cultural or religious practices. Arguably, I have had a privileged position and opportunity to study, in the most ‘natural’ way, their monastic lives; their relationships within the community and with outsiders; the internal dynamics of the institution; and their patterns of behaviour. As Fleming has noted, ‘an insider researcher may have access to privileged information, which may not necessarily be available to an outsider’, and generally ‘see more’.⁶⁹

Welch observed that most of his monk informants were ‘reticent’ with outsiders, ‘discouraged personal questions and refused to give concrete examples, [... but] were always willing to talk in general terms, that is, in terms of doctrine.’⁷⁰ Unlike ethnographers coming from the outside, I did not need to worry about how to gain access to the institution or how to collect reliable information from its members. Moreover, in a large monastery, I interacted with people of all backgrounds while participating in its day-to-day life and striving to behave correctly at all times; and this process honed my observational skills, just as it would have honed those of anyone trying to learn and survive in a new and unfamiliar environment. Indeed, I gained a wide array of experiences in this lively community: studying four years at its seminary, taking on the duty of an emcee in large-scale ceremonies, working in two of its overseas branches, and living in solitude in its meditation hut. Ellis has made the further suggestion that ‘stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds and are essential to

⁶⁷ Buswell (ibid., 14).

⁶⁸ I also draw on my experience of being a lay follower between 1993 and 2000.

⁶⁹ Fleming (2018, 314-315).

⁷⁰ Welch (1967, 84).

human understanding.⁷¹ I have therefore paid close attention to anecdotal stories circulated or published in the monastery, including my personal story, but at all times also bore in mind that I needed to be ethical in the use of my ‘insider knowledge’, not least by anonymising my informants.

Of course, being an insider-researcher is also marked by disadvantages.⁷² As Ellis has noted, ‘[p]ain often occurs in autoethnography’,⁷³ while Reed-Danahay has suggested that ‘the autoethnographer is a boundary-crosser, and the role can be characterized as that of a dual identity.’⁷⁴ My research methods, and in particular, my approach to data collection have been uniquely shaped by this ‘dual identity’, as both a longstanding monastic in the Chan tradition and as an early-stage Ph.D. student at a UK university, conducting research on that same tradition. The struggles and dilemmas caused by this dual status have contributed to a special perspective on how a researcher’s ideas and viewpoints are constructed by the process of research.

I was arguably less prepared for my research task than most postgraduate students. I had not read even one scholarly book on Buddhism before commencing research for my Ph.D. dissertation. In contrast to scholars whose knowledge is accumulated through study, and in particular through reading such books, my accumulated knowledge of my chosen academic subject matter was at first purely experiential. When I started reading, and saw how Chan Buddhist tradition is described and discussed in the scholarly literature, I was shocked, and a feeling of loneliness and frustration piled up around me as scholarly viewpoints and narratives that often ran counter to my previous monastic education.⁷⁵ As time went by, I realised that I

⁷¹ Ellis (2004, 32).

⁷² Breen (2007, 163).

⁷³ Ellis (2004, 111).

⁷⁴ Reed-Danahay (1997, 3).

⁷⁵ For example, scholars date back the origin of Chan to as early as the Tang dynasty. See Sharf (2014, 933). Conversely, ancient or modern Chan masters unanimously date back Chan’s origin to the mind-to-mind transmission passed down from the Buddha to the venerable Mahakasyapa in the fifth century BCE.

had become a rare boundary-crosser, who saw the two ‘worlds’ and distinct ‘truths’ of these parallel, unconnected discourses. I was gradually able to develop new perspectives and strategies that enabled me, first, to recognise the value of striking a balance between insiders’ perspectives and outsiders’ observations, and second, to actually do so.

How to ‘make the familiar strange’ and avoid the risks posed by one’s preconceptions about one’s research topic is a key challenge for any insider-researcher.⁷⁶ Fleming has suggested that it is useful to have ‘a critical friend who can interrogate and challenge your assumptions.’⁷⁷ With the guidance of my supervisor, who helped me become aware of my ‘insider biases’ and tendency to ‘preach’, I learned to create a distance from my own Buddhist tradition, despite it having been such a deep and integral part of my life; and I continue to try my best to view my past subjective experiences objectively. Ellis’s work also reminds us to see the ‘self’ with ‘self-awareness’ and a critical eye.⁷⁸ Thus, I have allowed myself to retain my insider’s identity and beliefs, but at the same time strive to see things beyond that horizon – in particular, when it comes to taking inspiration from other scholars’ comments. Hence, in the process of conducting research, my knowledge and interpretation of Chan Buddhism have developed far beyond the ideas I once took for granted within the confines of a Taiwanese monastery, and by transcending those boundaries and assumptions, I have developed the ability to think much more critically.

However, such an approach produces a further challenge: how to juggle between my subjectivity and objectivity when presenting and analysing the data. As a large part of my research draws on auto-ethnography, which emphasises and expands upon subjective experiences and feeling, whilst another part was conducted based on anthropological approaches that compelled me to limit such feeling, I have attempted to reconcile these

⁷⁶ Mannay (2010).

⁷⁷ Fleming (2018, 316).

⁷⁸ Ellis (2004).

conflicting sentiments throughout my research, taking note of my personal feelings and experiences without overemphasising them. In other words, I have treated my own personal experience as one kind of research data, not fundamentally unlike the information I gathered from my informants in the field.

In Heidegger's view, anything in a person's life can shape his/her understanding of a given phenomenon.⁷⁹ As such, all research is a result of who a researcher is or has been. And inevitably, every study is shaped by selectivity, which is also influenced by the researcher's personal background. I was brought up in a devout Buddhist family, which – coupled with my long commitment to the Chan tradition – has hugely affected my views of Chinese Buddhism. During my decade as a young nun at Chung Tai, I was well looked after and supported, and although I had to abide by that monastery's strict discipline, I enjoyed good relationships with my monk teacher and many of my monastic peers. These experiences are integral to my understanding of Chan Buddhism in general, and to my interpretations of life in its monastic communities in particular.

I do not intend to paint a rosy picture of Chan Buddhism or about Chan monastic life; nor do I intend to search for the 'dark side' of such life, as I believe doing so would have little value in promoting human wellbeing, as well as going against my ethical principles as a Buddhist nun. Moreover, focusing narrowly on either positive or negative aspects of my chosen topic would not serve my goal of fleshing out the skeletal representation of Chan Buddhism that emerges from the prior academic literature. Instead, therefore, my study attempts to resolve the imbalance in the representation of Chan Buddhism, by balancing outsider and insider perceptions, as discussed above, and giving voice to monastic practitioners of the Chan tradition who have hitherto remained invisible and unrepresented in such scholarship.

⁷⁹ Heidegger (1962).

1.5.3 Participant observation

Participant observation was conducted during my three trips to Yunmen, the first of which was in July 2016; the second, in January 2018; and the third, from March to May 2019. Before fieldwork commenced, in 2016, my research proposal was vetted and approved by Lancaster University's Faculty Research Ethics Committee. I also obtained official permission from Yunmen's abbot, on behalf of the whole community, to conduct interviews and engage in participant observation there. During my first field visit, I focused mainly on the similarities and differences in Chan monastic life between Yunmen and Chung Tai, and tried to capture their respective understandings of mindfulness and mind-cultivation. I participated in the daily monastic routine in Yunmen in addition to their special events, such as the annual summer camp for university students, harvesting rice, and transplanting rice seedlings in the paddy fields.⁸⁰ Due to my previous experience in Taiwan and initial data analysis, I was more certain about the direction of my follow-up fieldwork. During the second trip, I joined Yunmen's annual intensive meditative retreat and conducted participant observation. And on my third trip, I focused my attention on how the triple-platform ordination ceremony was performed in Mainland China. In all, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with the abbot and high-ranking monks in Yunmen and with the abbesses of its two affiliated nunneries. Throughout this fieldwork, I tried to keep an open mind, and was prepared to hold conversations with anyone I came across whilst attending activities or even randomly on the streets. In the end, there were around 70 of these open-ended conversations, with monks, nuns, and lay Buddhist practitioners. However, I have anonymised my informants to protect their identities, except where they have expressly agreed that their names can be revealed.

I arrived at Yunmen Monastery on 12 July 2016, one week before their summer-camp

⁸⁰ Last summer camp was held from 20-26 July 2016. Since 2017, the Chinese government has banned such activities in temples.

activities were due to start. I took the fastest modern form of transport available, a China's high-speed train, to this one-thousand-year-old monastery. There was a magnificent Chinese Buddhist building complex with yellow walls and green roofs, lined-up trees, and well-arranged gardens. Its atmosphere of peace and joy contrasted sharply with the account of Yunmen as dilapidated, even ruined, that I had read in the autobiography of Ven. Xuyun in my youth. I was greeted with a smile by Ven. Xingguo, a highly ranked monk then aged 36, who was wearing a long grey robe. Once I had settled in, Ven. Xingguo treated me and the two other university students who had accompanied me from the airport to a welcoming 'medicine meal',⁸¹ in a small dining room next to the public dining hall. If this meeting had happened 30 years earlier, I would have been greeted in a very different way. That is, if Ven. Foyuan were still alive, he might have tested me by asking questions or hitting me, as he is known to have done to visiting monks and even laypeople. His rationale for this aspect of his unique teaching style was that he had to gauge the nature of his disciples, and wake up their minds.

As McRae has noted, 'an encounter with one's spiritual ancestry' can be 'the key to understanding the present.'⁸² This first fieldwork visit to the monastery reminded me of my own Chan tradition, and evolved into a journey to trace the roots of my monastic identity. To the extent that the Chan Buddhist tradition can be likened to an extended family, meeting my monk and nun informants was like visiting distant relatives whom I had never met before. There seemed to be a pre-existing sense of mutual understanding and trust, grounded solidly in our shared tradition. From my first day in the monastery, my informants treated me like one of themselves. I was given the same items used in the monastery: a set of cutlery, differing from the ones laypeople used; a bowl; a new pair of chopsticks; and a clean piece of cloth for cleansing the bowl. During the daily dining ritual, if a lay donor made an offering of either

⁸¹ Due to monastic rule of fasting after midday, the practice of eating after midday in Chinese temples has been re-conceptualised as the act of taking medicine. See Chiu (2015).

⁸² McRae (2003, 130).

food or cash, I received an equal portion of it.⁸³ In short, due to my identity as a Buddhist nun, my informants at Yunmen saw me as an insider, even though I was visiting from Taiwan. They did not hesitate to express their feelings, and shared their joys and challenges with me as if we belonged to the same world.

On the first evening after my arrival, I had a three-hour conversation with several important monk informants. I felt that almost no effort was required to ‘build’ a rapport, because we already shared so many similar experiences and values. For example, when they told me stories about how strict their monk teacher was, but also how flexible his teaching was, I immediately recalled my own parallel experiences. These monks were eager to answer my questions, and continued to assist me in every way that I required during my stay there.

It should also be noted that there were no linguistic or cultural barriers to our mutual understanding. Everyone in the monastery seemed to know Buddhist etiquette and protocol without it being mentioned or explained. Towards the end of the conversation alluded to above, only one monk informant, one female volunteer, and myself remained in the room. When the female volunteer expressed a wish to leave, the monk informant and I both immediately stood up, each knowing that we should avoid being in a room alone with a member of the opposite sex: one of the insiders’ tacit rules.

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that it is not commonplace or easy for young female researchers to enter the male-dominated Yunmen monastery, and even nun guests are normally allowed to stay only for one night at a time. Staying for perhaps as long as three days might be acceptable if one were participating in harvesting chores or a lengthier Buddhist ceremony; but in principle, young females are not allowed to stay there for any extended period. In my case, Prof. Qu Junxiong, a long-term lay member of the monastery, established initial

⁸³ Instead of a red envelope filled with money, everyone receives a piece of bookmark-like paper, which one can exchange for money at the reception of the monastery once a month.

contact with the monastery to obtain permission for my research. Due to the long-term relationship of trust he had already established there, and to my status as a Buddhist nun from Taiwan, I was granted special permission to enter the field site for up to 45 days, a rare departure from the norm.

My Taiwanese identity attracted a great deal of attention and curiosity from my Mainland Chinese informants. In almost every conversation involving one or more new interlocutors, they would introduce me by saying ‘She is a nun from *Taiwan*’. My informants were curious not only about me, but also about the situation in Taiwan.⁸⁴ Whenever I asked them anything about their daily monastic life, they would always answer back, ‘So, how would you do it in Taiwan?’ Taiwan and Mainland China seemed to have become mirrors to each other, remaining intertwined despite the competition and tensions between them. As Frettingham and Hwang have insightfully argued, China

is historically the source of its [Taiwan’s] ethnicity, culture, and languages; it is politically a contestant or enemy; and it’s one of Taiwan’s deepest and most recurring images of ‘the Other.’⁸⁵

In this respect, arriving from Taiwan conferred many kinds of privilege on me during my visits. I was treated like a special guest and was provided with the best-equipped accommodation in the monastery. At the end of my first fieldwork visit, I had a personal meeting with Yunmen’s abbot, who wanted to hear my comments and advice on their summer camp, and more generally about how ‘their’ ceremonial ritual was conducted differently to ‘ours’ in Taiwan. This seemed to reflect a more widely held view on the part of Chinese monastics, that the development of Buddhism in Taiwan was well-established or even highly advanced.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ My fieldwork experience resonates with Laliberté’s (2019, 37) view: ‘Buddhist institutions of PRC have shown great interest in knowing more about the welfare of their counterparts in Taiwan since the beginning of reform policy’.

⁸⁵ Frettingham and Hwang (2017, 348).

⁸⁶ For example, see Tsomo (2004, 219).

During my fieldwork conducted between 2016 and 2019, I also witnessed and experienced significant changes in the relationship between Mainland China and Taiwan. As political restrictions on religion in Mainland China became more stringent,⁸⁷ my informants also gradually became more careful about sharing information and interacting with me. Especially after June 2016, when official cross-Straits dialogue ceased,⁸⁸ the political situation affected the closeness of my relationship to Yunmen and its members. In 2019, when I applied to make my third visit to Yunmen, the informants who used to welcome me hesitated, and told me that they needed to ‘confirm the current policy’ of the government before deciding whether they could allow me to visit them again.

On the one hand, my past training and experience in a monastery in Taiwan enabled me to notice the similarities and differences in every aspect of their monastic life. On the other, I was constantly challenged by what I observed, especially when a practice went against what I had known in my previous training. The tension between my religious ideals and the ‘imperfect’ social reality I encountered became an obstacle to my analysis of the collected data. However, I came to realise how mistaken I had been in judging this information based on my personal subjective values. I gradually learned that anthropological research must be grounded and understood in the field, just like cooking a carrot taken from the field. I could not criticise the shape and size of the carrot; I simply had to cook it. Instead of ‘judging’, I chose to reflect upon the kinds of social and political conditions that had produced and shaped the differences in monastic training in Mainland China and Taiwan. As Berger and Stone have highlighted, ‘the field isn’t only a place, and fieldwork means far more than research in a distant locale; rather, fieldwork is a way of seeing the world and making sense of social phenomena.’⁸⁹ Likewise,

⁸⁷ For example, many Buddhist temples and churches were torn down. See Johnson (accessed October 15, 2019). Also see Albert and Maizland (accessed December 5, 2020).

⁸⁸ Beijing cut off official communication with Taiwan after President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan (the Republic of China [ROC]) refused to endorse the idea of a single Chinese nation. See Hernández (accessed September 20, 2019).

⁸⁹ Berger and Stone (2019).

Kisliuk defines ‘field’ as ‘broad conceptual zone united by a chain of inquiry’.⁹⁰ After I was able to change my mindset by unlocking my presumptions, which I had originally tried to impose on my data from the field, my data analysis began to progress more smoothly.

Buswell has argued that ‘the typical tools of anthropology and sociology are not always effective when dealing with ordained religious.’⁹¹ Indeed, the environment of a monastery is very different from the mundane world in terms of its ‘other-worldly’ values and distinctive modes of interpersonal interaction. Especially in a highly disciplined monastery like Yunmen, solitude and silence are highly admired individual qualities, so understandably, not everyone wanted to talk. My being a nun also made it inappropriate – and often, impossible – to ‘hang out’ with my monk informants for long periods of time. Yet, despite these obvious limitations on data collection, my previous monastic-training experiences helped me to make the most of the interactions I had with my informants.

The five semi-structured interviews alluded to above were with the abbot of Yunmen in 2016; the vice abbot, in 2016 and 2018; and the abbesses of Xiaoxitian and Qianfota Si in 2016 and 2019. Interviewing these high-ranking monks and nuns was useful, as they were very knowledgeable and eloquent, and were authoritative figures whose replies could be taken, to a considerable extent, as representative of the views of their whole communities. However, I also quickly noticed that my identity as a Chan Buddhist nun was a great obstacle to effective interviewing, as my informants often assumed that I had considerable insider knowledge, to the point that I must already know what they knew, or even how they felt. As such, I felt unable to ask simple and naive questions as if I were an outsider – despite, in some senses, actually being one. This feeling struck me most forcefully when I was interviewing the abbess of Xiaoxitian. When I asked her opinion of the meaning of the term mindfulness, which was

⁹⁰ Kisliuk (1997, 23-44).

⁹¹ Buswell (1992, 15).

written on the pillar of the entrance door, she replied: ‘How many years have you been a nun? [...] Have you not learned it in the Buddhist institute?’ Her surprise and evident feeling of having been placed in an awkward situation by my ‘simple’ question were usually replicated by my other informants when I asked them such questions. Thus, I gradually realised that having an ‘insider’ conversation – for example, by having a chat over tea – was the most natural and effective way of acquiring information.

As part of their general stance of humility, monastic members of Yunmen Temple usually worked in silence, and when they did talk, they avoided saying things that drew attention to the self, even when articulating their individual practices or ideas about Chan Buddhism. For this reason, I rarely conducted interviews with my informants; but taking a broader view, one could even say that ‘being interviewed’ was inherently incompatible with their religious culture and routine. Having observed this, I developed an alternative tactic for collecting data. Most monks drink tea, and some have personal tea sets and collections of tea leaves. At Yunmen, the process of making tea seemed to be a means of building relationships, as well as a non-verbal expression of their thoughts on spiritual cultivation. That is, details of how they personally brewed and served tea embodied their views of mindfulness and respective understandings of the Chan tradition.

Often, fascinating data emerged during these teatimes, in the form of spontaneous recounting of life stories, experiences, and beliefs about spiritual cultivation. I kept my heart open and was prepared to have a conversation at any time with anyone, whether monks, nuns, or lay practitioners, and endeavour to understand how they practised Chan Buddhism in their daily lives. I never made recordings or took notes during these conversations, as it would have been disruptive and appeared unnatural; my intention was to simply keep the interaction going, with the broader purpose of gaining deep insights and hearing my informants’ authentic voices.

1.6 Remaining chapters

In this dissertation, I examine the role of mindfulness in the living traditions of two Chan Buddhist monasteries. Despite cross-Strait differences in how monastics live, my two research sites have much in common. As we shall see, mindfulness is anchored in the reality of every aspect of their interpersonal relationships, as well as serving the overt religious purpose of supporting them on their path to liberation. In both monasteries, the master-disciple relationship formed the foundation of knowledge transmission, and the teaching of mindfulness is no exception to this person-to-person process. Peer relationships within both monasteries were also important to it, insofar as they embodied a training platform for mindfulness and a collective disciplinary power, and reflected their mission to disseminate the Bodhisattva Path.

In Chapter 2, I explore the Chan masters' lineage, focusing on the life histories of three eminent masters, and argue that such individuals' mode of living in itself embodies mindfulness, especially via their exertion of altruistic leadership. Secondly, I explore how mindfulness is transmitted in master-disciple relationships in the two focal monasteries, along with the pedagogical practices of Chan masters in terms of how such relationships are used to cultivate mental strength, overcome poor mental qualities, and unfold spiritual virtues. Chapter 3 examines how the triple-platform ordination rite and training serve as the 'entry point' to a moral community; and how one's acquisition of a new monastic identity is built upon many conditions and interrelations. Chapter 4 consists of a detailed exploration of the practices of everyday monastic life, including in the seminaries, and how they may be conducive to the attainment of mindfulness. In Chapter 5, which introduces traditional Chan meditation retreats, I analyse how the prescribed ritual performances, monastic rules, and meditative techniques help practitioners cultivate mindfulness and ultimately achieve awakening. I argue that one's faith serves the ultimate goal of awakening to one's true nature, achieved through the mutual support and trust cultivated in the relationship among the teacher, supporters, and meditators.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the interrelatedness of mindfulness, enlightenment, morality, and interpersonal relationships in the living Chan monastic tradition; and the concluding chapter summarises and evaluates my findings, and points out some possible areas for further research.

Chapter 2 The spiritual authority of patriarchs

According to Cornille, one's experience of self-realisation 'cannot be transmitted through words. One can only point to the direction, suggest it as did the Upanishads. It consists of an awakening, and only a competent guru is able to bring about that awakening in the disciple.'⁹² Though this statement describes Indian gurus, it applies equally well to the crucial role of masters as spiritual figures in the Chinese Chan patriarchal system: that is, transmitting inner knowledge and leading disciples to reach their 'inner master' and awaken to the ultimate religious experience.⁹³ As Sharf has stated, 'the Buddha's supreme truth is not passed down through the scriptures, but through a living person-to-person transmission of the cardinal teaching.'⁹⁴ Though Buddhism declares that one should follow the dharma, not the master,⁹⁵ I will argue that human interaction remains a cornerstone of the tradition, through which the 'truth' of the tradition is determined and passed on from generation to generation.

In this chapter, I explore how the teaching and knowledge of mindfulness is transmitted in Chan monasteries through master-disciple relationships, using the evidence of hagiographical biographies as well as my first-hand fieldwork experiences. I begin with an overview of the classic prototype of a Chan master in ancient hagiographical texts. Following a brief discussion of patterns in the traditional image of a sainted monk, the chapter examines the hagiographic narratives of the lives of the three modern Chan masters in the two focal monasteries, as well as the images they constructed. In particular, I will show how Chan masters themselves serve as instruments of communication about dharma and as living embodiments of mindfulness. This exploration provides us with an analytical lens through which to view how a Chan master's life and practice shape the understanding of mindfulness

⁹² Cornille (1991, 79).

⁹³ The difference from the notion in Hinduism is that the 'inner master' in Chan Buddhism is understood to be the Buddha nature.

⁹⁴ Sharf (2017, 114).

⁹⁵ The idea of 'relying on the dharma and not the person' is one of the four types of bases known as *siyifa* (the Four Reliances) based on Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra (T12n374.p401b25-c1). See Hu (2002).

among his disciples and influence the formation, standing, and continuity of Buddhist moral communities.

2.1 The pivotal status and hagiographical prototype of a Chan master

Those seeking to comprehend the roles of masters in medieval Chan literature usually focus on one of two genres: *yulu*, anecdotal ‘records’ of interaction between a master and his disciples, or Buddhist hagiography. Irrespective of the genre chosen, however (as Ferguson has pointed out), Western scholarship has long tended to express doubt not only about the specific narrative content of these accounts,⁹⁶ but of the very existence of Chan patriarchs.⁹⁷ It is true enough that ancient Chinese Buddhist biographies are often seen as histories entwined with the light of miracle, like ‘a body of religious mythology’;⁹⁸ and that hagiographical records, by their nature, idealise and romanticise their subjects. But none of this has diminished the appeal of Chan transmission or the concept of the enlightened master, either among scholars or in monasteries. Kieschnick, Heine, and McRae, among others, have highlighted the importance of spiritual representation and educational function in these prototypical sayings and stories.⁹⁹ Kieschnick, in his study of three collections of ancient Chinese Buddhist hagiography from the sixth to the tenth centuries, argued that these accounts are representative of ‘monastic imagination’ and powerful tools with which to ‘spread the Way.’¹⁰⁰ Moreover, they form ‘models for the monastic community [...] held up as ideals to which ordinary monks should aspire’;¹⁰¹ and Chan patriarchs ‘serve as exemplars of enlightened behaviour’ for subsequent

⁹⁶ One example is Buswell’s (1992, 4) statement: ‘such texts [normative texts of the tradition as *teng-lu*] were never intended to serve as guides to religious practice or as records of daily practice; they were instead mythology and hagiography’. Likewise, Schlütter (2007, 381) questioned about the Patriarch Huineng by saying that he ‘is an elusive figure’ and ‘it is very doubtful that he really played the role of father of the Chinese Chan school.

⁹⁷ Ferguson et al. (2011, 1).

⁹⁸ Foulk (1993, 149-150).

⁹⁹ See, among others, Ferguson et al. (2011), Heine and Wright (2010), and McRae (2014).

¹⁰⁰ Kieschnick (1997, 1-7).

¹⁰¹ Kieschnick (ibid., 8).

generations of students.¹⁰² In short, hagiographical images of charismatic Chan patriarchs perform a multifaceted and, arguably, irreplaceable function in Chan tradition.¹⁰³

A Chan patriarch was defined by Bodhidharma in *Zongjing Lu* (*The Record of the Axiom Mirror*),¹⁰⁴ the first person to hold such a title, as someone who ‘realises the Buddha’s mind seal without the slightest differences or mistakes and acts in accordance with Buddhist doctrinal understanding.’¹⁰⁵ This definition clearly links both the charisma and the legitimate authority of a Chan patriarch to an ideal of ‘authenticity.’ Harter has defined this concept as acting ‘in accord with the true self, [and] expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings.’¹⁰⁶ Thus, followers can judge if a person is a ‘true’ Chan master by observing whether his words and actions correspond to each other.

The ancient hagiography of Chan patriarchs often, though not inevitably, reveals a normative ideal of an enlightened Chan master with the following attributes. They are novice practitioners who passionately seek the dharma, are eager to learn from experienced Chan masters, engage in ascetic practices and even undergo supernatural experiences during their spiritual quest, reach awakening, establish a temple, and disseminate the teaching until the end of their life.¹⁰⁷ The peaceful end of their life is normally accompanied by their *shelizi* (Buddhist relics),¹⁰⁸ which prove their transcendental achievement. This archetype seems to reveal two essential bases of being considered a Chan patriarch: personal struggle and hardship in the first half of one’s life, and educational responsibility in the second half. Collateral support for this

¹⁰² McRae (2003, 12).

¹⁰³ It is relevant to what McRae (2014) argues about multiple functions of the hagiographical image of Bodhidharma.

¹⁰⁴ Bodhidharma was an Indian monk who brought Buddhism to China. He is seen as the first patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism. See, among others, Bodhidharma and Broughton (1999).

¹⁰⁵ *Zongjing Lu* (T48n2016.p428b11-12) is known to have been written by Ven. Yongming Yanshou (904-75).

¹⁰⁶ Harter (2002, 382).

¹⁰⁷ The long process of striving for the Way can be seen, for example, in the case of Chan Master Changqing (854-932), who broke seven meditation mats by sitting for 20 years in the pursuit of enlightenment (X83n1578.p612a24-b1). Another case is of Chan Master Zhaozhou (778-897), who travelled throughout China to study Buddhism until he was 80 years old (See J24nB137.p371c14-17).

¹⁰⁸ It refers to physical remains of a cremated body, kept usually in pearl- or crystal-like bead-shaped objects, as the sign of one’s spiritual achievement.

view is provided by the fact that eminent Chan masters are rarely written about as withdrawing themselves from the world after their awakening, or as cutting off their interactions with sentient beings. Rather, the majority are described as having devoted their whole lives to others' liberation, again highlighting master-disciple relationships as the central aspect of Chan masters' post-awakening lives.

Ancient imagery of Chan masters seems to exert a continuing influence on how practitioners seek and see Chan masters today. By the same token, a modern Chan master must demonstrate authenticity in his understanding of Buddhist teaching and express deep spiritual realization, not only to better serve as a model for his disciples, but also to manifest these classical constructs. When teaching Chan Buddhism, as Ven. Changlian has put it, 'setting an example in action [...] is more vital than spreading it through words.'¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Ven. Guo-Jun has noted that 'in Chan, we venerate our lineage masters after a thorough investigation.'¹¹⁰ In other words, disciples evaluate and observe their master continuously, based on how he embodies inner knowledge in his daily life. Thus, observing, evaluating, and imitating a Chan master are all essential elements of being the junior partner in knowledge transmission in this tradition. Whether or not a patriarch is held to be a source of religious authority or inspiration depends critically on how he demonstrates his knowledge in actual practice.

¹⁰⁹ Ven. Changlian (2016, 209).

¹¹⁰ Ven. Guo-Jun (accessed April 30, 2020).

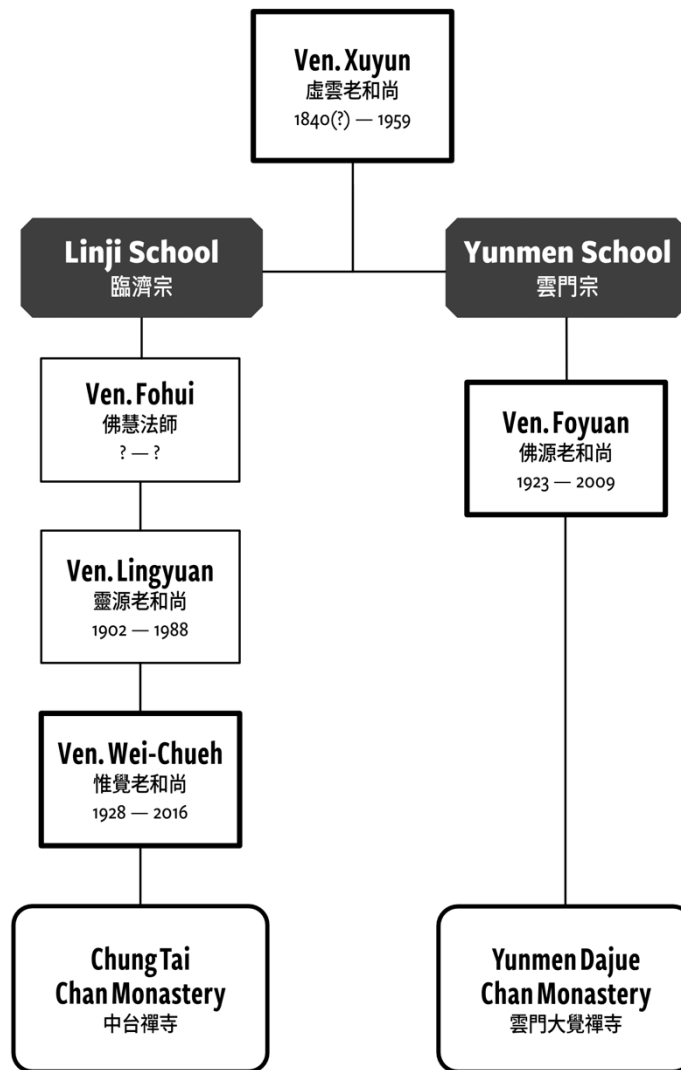


Figure 2 Lineage diagram of this study's three focal Chan masters

2.2 The fate of Chan Buddhism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The lives of the three Chan masters dealt with in this chapter — Ven. Xuyun (1840?-1959), Ven. Foyuan (1922-2009), and Ven. Wei-Chueh (1928-2016) — span a time of dramatic change in China, arguably the most turbulent in its history, marked by ‘foreign intrusions, famine, civil war, and constant struggle in social, political, and religious spheres among conservatives, progressives, and radical modernists.’¹¹¹ They, like many other Chinese, found

¹¹¹ Pittman (2001, 1).

themselves embroiled in a fight for Buddhism's survival. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Buddhist monasteries and monastics faced multiple horrific episodes of *fanan* (internecine anti-Buddhist persecution). The Taiping Rebellion of 1850 to 1864 advocated the rooting out of traditional religions, and of traditions more generally, and was marked by the destruction of Buddhist artefacts, documents, and whole monasteries.¹¹² A generation later, the *miaochan xingxue* campaign was launched to target and use the assets owned by Buddhist and Taoist temples for schools, and lasted from 1898 into China's early Republican period, threatening the livelihoods of Buddhist monastics.¹¹³ When China's two-millennium-old imperial system came to an end in 1911, the country faced foreign invasions and wars,¹¹⁴ and the Chinese Civil War between Nationalists and Communists lasted for more than two decades beginning in 1927.

However, the fact that Chinese Buddhism proved powerless in face of such challenges and repression was closely associated with its severe internal corruption.¹¹⁵ The cash income of Buddhist monasteries came mainly from conducting funeral rituals,¹¹⁶ though they also accumulated and privatised lands,¹¹⁷ and lost their educational functions as studies of doctrine and *vinaya* withered. Monastic ordination ceremonies were held in a hasty manner,¹¹⁸ and many monastics were uneducated and neglected the moral precepts.¹¹⁹ These factors all contributed to a deterioration in the overall image of Buddhism, rendering it easy for outsiders

¹¹² The Taiping Rebellion, the largest civil conflict of the Qing dynasty (1636-1912), was commanded by Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864) with the goal of ruling the country by Christianity and upending Qing emperors. According to Ji et al. (2019, 22), the destructive consequence of the Taiping Rebellion on Buddhism is 'comparable with Mao's persecution in magnitude and violent scope'.

¹¹³ Ji (2015) points out that the Buddhist community's stubborn resistance to the campaign also contributed to its progress. For more detailed discussion of *miaochan xingque* campaign, see Duara (1991) and Huang (1991).

¹¹⁴ These included First Opium War (1839-1841), Second Opium War (1856-1860), First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), Eight-Nation Alliance (1900-1901), and Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).

¹¹⁵ See Pittman (2001, 338) and Wang (2013, 4).

¹¹⁶ See Ji (2015, 37; 88) and Pittman (ibid., 49).

¹¹⁷ Pittman (ibid.)

¹¹⁸ Ji (2015, 21-22).

¹¹⁹ Ji (ibid., 17).

to paint it as superstitious and unproductive.

As Pittman highlights, ‘the chaotic republican period in China (1912-1949) was one of intense self-criticism, ideological polarization, military conflict, and change.’¹²⁰ In response to these external and internal challenges, the chorus of voices advocating the modernisation of Buddhism began to grow. Their opinions on how to save Buddhism in China can be divided into two broad categories. One, prominently voiced by the modernist monk Ven. Taixu (1890-1947), was *renjian fojiao* (humanistic Buddhism).¹²¹ The other, more conservative approach was led by Ven. Yuan-Ing (1878-1953).¹²² As Ji points out, the divisions and disagreements between these two schools of reformist thought were multifarious, and included how best to run schools, revitalise the dharma, reform monasticism, and protect temple assets.¹²³ Chan master Xuyun, effectively the figurehead of Chinese Chan Buddhism in the same period, did not involve himself in these debates, focusing instead on the revival of the Chan lineages of five houses.¹²⁴

Following the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Chinese Buddhism in Mainland China continued to face major challenges, including a series of national movements. Foremost among these were *tugai* (land reform) in the 1950s, and from 1966 to 1976, the Cultural Revolution, which caused mass chaos and death and badly damaged Buddhism directly. Despite a more relaxed attitude during the subsequent era of reform, all

¹²⁰ Pittman (2001, 1).

¹²¹ Ven. Taixu, a major reformer of 20th-century Chinese Buddhism, proposed the idea of constructing a Pure Land in the human realm and advocated Buddhists to contribute to the society in the spirit of Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching instead of focusing on other-worldly funeral rituals. He used the term *rensheng fojiao* in 1928, which was later reworded as *renjian fojiao* (‘Buddhism for the Human World’ or ‘Humanistic Buddhism’). For a detailed discussion of *renjian fojiao*, see DeVido (2019) and Pittman (2001). According to Pacey (2005), Ven. Taixu and Ven. Yinshun (1906-2005) were the authors of *renjian fojiao*; this philosophy has widely shaped the mainstream Taiwanese Buddhist communities such as Ciji, Foguangshan, and Fagushan. Notably, Chung Tai Chan Monastery is the only one among the ‘four great mountains’ in Taiwan that does not claim to be the successor of *renjian fojiao*.

¹²² Ven. Taixu advocated a modern and aggressive revolution on transforming Buddhism through three aspects: doctrine, monasticism, and temple property. Ven. Yuaning suggested a gentle way to reform the ancestral rules and restore the traditional spirit.

¹²³ Ji (2010).

¹²⁴ The five houses refer to the five major schools of Chan Buddhism: Guiyang school, Linji school, Caodong school, Fayen school, and Yunmen school.

religion in Mainland China remains controlled at the national level, and the development of Chan Buddhism – like that of all other religions – still faces many constraints.¹²⁵ For example, religious ceremonies and other gatherings may not be performed outside the walls of religious venues; and, above a certain size, such events tend to be prohibited altogether.¹²⁶ Limitations are also placed on the number of monastics who can be ordained in a full-ordination ceremony.¹²⁷ Since the rise to power of the current President of the PRC, Xi Jinping, a series of policies have strengthened the pro-government political content of education in the religious sphere. Flag-raising ceremonies in temples, and advocacy of socialism with Chinese characteristics, are likewise reshaping the outlook of Chinese Chan monasteries in a more ‘patriotic’ direction.¹²⁸

On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, Chinese folk religion and Buddhism gradually took root during the waves of immigration from the Mainland during the late Ming and Qing dynasties.¹²⁹ Japan’s colonisation of Taiwan between 1895 and 1945 also shaped the religious landscape there.¹³⁰ However, as pointed out by Jones, Japanisation provoked countervailing

¹²⁵ Many scholars, such as Gareth Fisher, Ji Zhe, Dan Smyer Yü, and Alison Denton Jones, have researched on the religious revival in China after the opening-up era, while some point out that the tug-of-war between politics and religion continues. For example, the PRC government has the power to decide ‘which monasteries should be reopened...which monks and nuns should be restored to leadership positions’ (Qin 2000:238).

¹²⁶ Ji (2010, 33) points out that ‘the party-state continued to consider religion as dangerous and harmful [in Mainland China after 1980s]...Collective religious practices were confined to a small number of authorized “venues for religious practices”...and the clergy were not allowed to proselytize Buddhist teachings outside of these settings’.

¹²⁷ According to the Buddhist Association of China (BAC) regulation dated 24 July 2019, the Rite of Ordination throughout the country should be held about ten times a year, with a limit of 350 ordinands per time. BAC was founded in 1953 as an official Buddhist organisation in Mainland China. Arguably, it highlights a control of state on the number of people making formal religious vows. See The Buddhist Association of China (accessed September 15, 2020). Conversely, there is no limitation on either the frequency of full ordination rites or the number of ordinands in Taiwan, which accentuates the atmosphere of freedom of religion.

¹²⁸ Apart from Chan monasteries, such a patriotic direction is also followed by other religious groups. For example, see Kuo (2011) and Laliberté (2015). For an overview of contemporary Buddhism in China, see Ji et al. (2019).

¹²⁹ Wang (2014).

¹³⁰ For the four great lineages of Taiwan Buddhism during the Japanese colonial period, see Jones (1996, 81–123). Ven. Hui-Yan (2003) points out the Japanese influences on Buddhist education in Taiwan as they established schools or seminaries in Taiwan.

sentiment and even resistance.¹³¹ Similarly, Yao has suggested that although Japanese Buddhism became prevalent in Taiwan, most of the local Buddhists practised a quasi-Buddhism, referred to as *Zhaijiao* (the vegetarian religion).¹³²

After 1949, the destinies of the heirs to Ven. Xuyun's Chan lineage in Mainland China and Taiwan diverged even more dramatically. Amid an influx of Mainland monks and nuns, this lineage was mainly restored in Taiwan by his disciple, Ven. Lingyuan. In response to the PRC's Cultural Revolution, the Kuomintang (KMT)-led government of the Republic of China (ROC) launched the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement to preserve and revive Chinese heritage on 12 November 1966.¹³³ Religious freedom in Taiwan remains virtually boundless,¹³⁴ supervised only by the small Religious Affairs Section of the Department of Civil Affairs.¹³⁵ Moreover, because it was largely unaffected by the disasters and destruction of the twentieth century on the Mainland, Buddhism in Taiwan is often seen as encapsulating Chinese Buddhist tradition in general. As Laliberté has noted, 'after the cultural revolution almost destroyed the last remnants of their institutions on the Mainland, Buddhist leaders and younger generations of monks and laypeople looked to Taiwan as a source of continuity for their tradition.'¹³⁶

Cross-Strait Buddhist cultural exchanges also rapidly increased after 2 November 1987, when Taiwan's government first allowed visits to the Mainland. As May has pointed out, drawing on her fieldwork on the Mazu cult, this relatively recent emergence of cross-Strait religious observances created a 'community of Chinese coastal peoples and cultures that did

¹³¹ Jones (1996).

¹³² Yao (2012, 8).

¹³³ Lin (2001) suggests that at the political level, the KMT government launched the movement to claim ROC as the contemporary successor of Chinese cultural tradition and *daotong*, the lineage of the Way, inherited from Emperor Yao (2356-2255 BCE), Emperor Shun (2294-2184 BCE), and Yu (2123-2025 BCE). For details, see Lin (2001).

¹³⁴ According to Madsen (2015, 1), the lifting of martial law in 1987 has marked a milestone to Taiwan's political and democratic transition and contributed to 'religious renaissance' in Taiwan.

¹³⁵ In the past two decades, Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan has emerged as a rapidly expanding area of scholarly interests. For further discussions on the present and future of Taiwanese Buddhism, see, among others, Clart and Jones (2003), DeVido (2010), Frettingham and Hwang (2017), Kuo (2008), and Laliberté (2004).

¹³⁶ Laliberté (2019, 37).

not conform to existing political borders’ and which ‘rework[ed] the ritual relations and spatial boundaries of communities long separated from one another’.¹³⁷ Despite the long-standing political hostility between Mainland China and Taiwan, Buddhist practices across the Taiwan Strait mirror each other, offering opportunities for comparison and reflection that have been deemed useful by both sides.¹³⁸

2.3 Ven. Xuyun

As Holmes Welch explained in the 1980s, Xuyun

was the most revered monk in China [in the 20th century]. No other had so many lay disciples. No other had such renown for the practice and teaching of meditation. No other had rebuilt so many ancient monasteries [... If he] was born in 1840, his life had spanned the entire period of China’s painful entry into the modern world. He was the living embodiment of the pre-modern Buddhist tradition[.]¹³⁹

Today, Ven. Xuyun retains this unassailable position of respect within Chan Buddhism. Campo noted her surprise, when conducting fieldwork at Buddhist sites in China in 2006, to come across idealised images of Ven. Xuyun almost everywhere.¹⁴⁰ It is not a stretch to argue that his saintly image, as much as his teaching, has deeply influenced and shaped what it means to be a Chan practitioner today. In many of his photographs, his eyes are half-closed and directed downwards. To many of his followers, such images radiate noble simplicity and a profound equanimity, which contrasts to the chaotic time in which he was living.

Ven. Xuyun’s actual life story, however, is notoriously difficult to narrate. The surviving sources are fragmentary, and even his birth year has been the subject of extensive scholarly speculation.¹⁴¹ As Campo has noted, *Nianpu*, the most authoritative primary source available

¹³⁷ Yang (2008, 340-430).

¹³⁸ Some scholars also warn that although cross-strait religious interaction is welcomed by both Mainland China and Taiwan, it has different political implications and calculations for both the atheist Chinese communist government and the democratic Taiwanese government (Brown and Cheng 2012).

¹³⁹ Welch (1972, 247).

¹⁴⁰ Campo (2016).

¹⁴¹ Scholars have proposed various speculations on his actual birth year. For example, Campo (ibid.) suggests Ven. Xuyun’s period ranged from 1864 to 1959, Ip (2017) suggests it as 1840-1958, Chen (2002, 10) as 1856-1864, and Ven. Yin-Shun (2004) has put master’s age at 110.

on the subject, ‘blurs the lines between biography, autobiography, and hagiography’, and this is the root cause of the controversy surrounding this master’s life.¹⁴² In 2009, the demystification of Ven. Xuyun’s legendary life was given new impetus by the publication of a nine-volume collection of historic records, *Xuyun Heshang Zhuanji*, including his own photos, hand-written letters to many monastics and laypeople, dharma talks, poems, and biographical records from newspapers, magazines, and temple pamphlets.¹⁴³ While even this did not produce a clear consensus about the historical facts of Ven. Xuyun’s life, my intention here is not to do so; rather, it is to examine his saintly image in Buddhist popular culture, since through that image, the ideal of mindfulness in Chan tradition has been shaped.

According to *Nianpu*, Ven. Xuyun was ordained at the age of 20 by Ven. Miao-Lian (1824-1907) at Yongquan Si in Fujian Province. His early spiritual cultivation was based on the ascetic practices known as *toutuo*. For two lengthy periods, he hid himself in mountain caves, first to practise repentance (1859-61) and later to deepen his meditation practice (1866-69). It is said that he sustained himself with stream-water, pine needles and blades of grass. In 1882, he undertook a three-year pilgrimage from Mount Putuo to Mount Wutai, prostrating himself every three steps along the way in prayer for his deceased mother. Between 1887 and 1907, he travelled to many sacred Buddhist sites in China as well as abroad, including Tibet, Burma (now Myanmar), Japan, India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Siam (Thailand). To repay his debt to his parents, he burned off the ring finger of his left hand as an offering to the Buddha at Ayuwang Si in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province. It is also said that he had an awakening in 1895 during a Chan meditation retreat at Gaomin Si, when his hand was scalded by hot water and the teacup smashed on the ground. He entered a prolonged state of *samādhi* during the snowy season in the Zhongnan Mountains in 1901, and his miraculous powers and mysterious

¹⁴² Campo (2016, 104). Its potential status as autobiography notwithstanding, *Nianpu* – first published in Chinese in 1953 – is ascribed principally to Cen Xuelü (1882-1963). Later, Cen revised it several times, a process that culminated in the current version in 1961.

¹⁴³ Ven. Jinghui (2016b).

experiences are recounted in the local legends of various places he visited. For instance, it is said that ancient cypress trees turned into green shoots when he transmitted precepts during a triple-platform ordination ceremony at Nanhua Monastery in 1935.¹⁴⁴

There is much less to question, however, in the accounts of Ven. Xuyun's contribution to perpetuating the lineages of five schools of Chan Buddhism. Beginning in 1902, he oversaw the restoration of Buddhist temples at Mount Jizu, near the border between Myanmar and Kunming Province; and from then until his death in 1959, he worked to transmit the precepts, rebuild large public Chan monasteries, revive *chanqi*, and restore temple discipline. As Campo has suggested, these restorative activities were a response to what he saw as the decline of Buddhism.¹⁴⁵ Numerous scholars other than Campo have also focused on this influential figure. Ip, for example, adopted the life of Ven. Xuyun as a reference point from which to investigate the preservation and development of Chinese Buddhism in the early PRC.¹⁴⁶ Chen also chose Ven. Xuyun as a case study of how Chinese Buddhists reacted to the shifts in state power and other dramatic political changes that flowed from the founding of that state in 1949.¹⁴⁷

For the purposes of this dissertation, the most important period of Ven. Xuyun's life was from 1943 to 1951, when he resided at and restored Yunmen.¹⁴⁸ In exploring that period, I will draw mainly on the Chinese collection *Xuyun Heshang Quanji*, as well as the oral and literary information available and circulating in Yunmen. The majority of monks and devotees at Yunmen Monastery today learn about Ven. Xuyun and his miraculous experiences both from *Nianpu* and from oral traditions passed down by Ven. Foyuan, who learned from him directly. During my fieldwork, I met a ninety-four-year-old female lay devotee who had met Ven. Xuyun when she was young. From her arrival at Yunmen in 1982, she experienced the hardships of

¹⁴⁴ Cen (2014, 90).

¹⁴⁵ Campo (2016, 115).

¹⁴⁶ Ip (2017).

¹⁴⁷ Chen (1996).

¹⁴⁸ Yunmen Monastery (2014a, 1523).

the reconstruction work at the monastery in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. She spoke Mandarin with a strong Cantonese accent, which was a challenge for me to understand, but with the help of a translator, I learned that when she was in her twenties, she brought her baby to attend a Triple Refuges ceremony at Liurong Si in Guangzhou. She recollected that when Ven. Xuyun hosted that ceremony, a dead tree on the temple premises was seen to blossom, which surprised everyone. Her statement echoes not only the story of the cypress trees recounted above, but also one in which peach trees suddenly blossomed at Jinghui Si on 23 September 1946,¹⁴⁹ when Ven. Xuyun hosted a ceremony for soldiers who had died in the war with Japan.¹⁵⁰ She described his temperament as like a ‘serene cloud’ in the sky, which incidentally matched the literal meaning of his name, ‘Empty Cloud’.

According to *Yunmen Shanzhi (The Records of Yunmen Monastery)*, Ven. Xuyun first visited that place in 1940, and was saddened to see that the temple was totally neglected and buried under weeds.¹⁵¹ There was only one monk living there, Ven. Mingkong, who had arrived at the abandoned monastery two years earlier, and was protecting the mummified body of Ven. Wenyan, founder of the Yunmen school. According to Chen, among all the temples Ven. Xuyun restored, Yunmen was one of the most challenging for him, due to the prevailing wartime conditions.¹⁵² Guangdong Province, where the monastery was located, had been hit by the worst famine in its history, due not only to the Japanese invasion but also extreme droughts in 1943, and millions of people died.¹⁵³ Unsurprisingly, it was very difficult to raise money in such circumstances that the restoration of Yunmen seemed impossible to many. Yet, with the support of a senior Nationalist military officer named Li Jishen (1885-1959) and the governor of Guangdong Province, Li Hanhun (1895-1987), Ven. Xuyun commenced this work towards

¹⁴⁹ It was later renamed Liurong Si.

¹⁵⁰ See Ven. Jinghui (2016a, 159).

¹⁵¹ Yunmen Monastery has undergone several small-scale restorations, and the available records show that it was repaired in 1573, 1608, 1692, 1704, 1800, 1849, and 1850. See Cen (2014, 9).

¹⁵² Chen (2002).

¹⁵³ Su (2018).

the end of 1943, leaving the running of Nanhua Si – which he had restored during 1934-43 – to his disciple Ven. Furen (1889-1973).¹⁵⁴

According to *Xuyun Heshang Quanji*, Ven. Xuyun settled into a room alone behind Yunmen's Guanyin Hall, from which he surveyed the topography of the monastery and planned its renovation.¹⁵⁵ Apparently not held back in any way by his great age, he effectively led around a hundred local workers in the demolition of its dilapidated buildings, and used Nanhua Monastery and Yongquan Monastery as models for its layout, where gaps in knowledge of the original layout could not otherwise be overcome.¹⁵⁶ In the spring of 1945, Ven. Xuyun used congee with tapioca flour to allay the hunger of a large group of refugees who had fled into the monastery to escape the Japanese occupation of the north of Guangdong.¹⁵⁷ In his search for ways to render the monastery financially self-sufficient, he established a farm, and to ensure a sufficient supply of agricultural workers for it, reintroduced the practice of *nongchan* (communal labour).¹⁵⁸

On top of its economic struggles, the monastery was soon faced with the threat of state suppression.¹⁵⁹ The *tugai* movement started in 1950, and many monks and nuns faced the threat of being arrested or executed as counter-revolutionaries over the ensuing decade.¹⁶⁰ In these circumstances of uncertainty and danger, Ven. Xuyun told his lay followers to flee abroad, but himself resolved to stay in Mainland China due to his concern for the safety of thousands of other monastics who remained there. In 1951, the local government of Ruyuan heard a rumour that the monastery was hiding weapons and had a secret telegraph station, so the police

¹⁵⁴ Cen (2014, 127).

¹⁵⁵ Ven. Jinghui (2016b, 67).

¹⁵⁶ In *Yunmen Shanzhi*, there is a detailed description on the layout of the newly restored monastery, names of its halls, and lists of its enshrined statues, and the total number of stupas, halls, and rooms are around one hundred and eighty. However, exactly how its restoration progressed year by year is unknown.

¹⁵⁷ Ven. Jinghui (2016a).

¹⁵⁸ Ven. Xuyun set up a detailed rule regarding distributing work; for example, everyone had to participate in farming, except those over sixty years and sick people.

¹⁵⁹ Ip (2017, 219).

¹⁶⁰ Welch (1972).

surrounded and searched it. Several causes have been ascribed this episode, which is remembered as the Yunmen Incident.¹⁶¹ First, an escaped criminal from Hunan Province was found to have tonsured at Yunmen – as had, according to Ven. Jinghui (1933-2013), some nationalist military officers and agents. Modern oral narratives of the incident mostly focus on how Ven. Xuyun, as the abbot of Yunmen, showed supreme calmness, protecting the monastery despite suffering terrible torture, and thereafter miraculously recovering. Ven. Jinghui, for example, provided this first-hand account:

On 24 February, the local authority sent hundreds of people to besiege the monastery with guns. The atmosphere was very tense. Hundreds of monks were imprisoned in the meditation hall for eighteen days and the pure Buddhist site turned into a horrific hell. During those three months, Ven. Xuyun was badly tortured and almost destroyed.

Ven. Foyuan described the same events as follows:

Beginning on 1 March, Ven. Xuyun was locked up separately in a room for interrogation. The police tried to force him to hand over hidden weapons and the gold, but he remained silent. On the third day, the police lost patience and hit him brutally with iron and wooden sticks. His bones were broken and blood covered his whole body. No matter what they asked him and did, Ven. Xuyun had his eyes closed and remained in silence in a sitting-meditation posture. These people punched him until they thought he was dead. He finally woke up a few days later.

After his miraculous survival of the Yunmen Incident, Ven. Xuyun did not relent from his missionary zeal.¹⁶² In 1952, he handed over the leadership of Yunmen to his disciple Ven. Foyuan before going on to restore Zhengru Si in Jiangxi Province, the founding site of Chan Buddhism's Caodong School, a project that would last the rest of his life. In all, he restored six ancient Chan monasteries and more than eighty temples.¹⁶³ A pervasive theme in the various accounts of the life of Ven. Xuyun is the perceived connection between his efforts for the continuity of the Chan tradition and his personal practices. Hunn commented: 'Throughout the

¹⁶¹ This is based on Ven. Jinghui's (2016a, 192) oral history.

¹⁶² He travelled to Beijing and advocated there the establishment of BAC between November 1952 and June 1953 to secure the position of Chinese Buddhism.

¹⁶³ Ven. Jinghui (ibid., 242).

master's long career, whether in good fortune or bad, he remained a simple and humble monk.'¹⁶⁴ He did not seek any personal comfort or fame, instead exhibiting a strong and sincere commitment to restoring Chan monasteries and spreading the dharma.

His last words contained a final reminder about mindfulness, addressed to his disciples: 'zheng-nian-zheng-xin yang-chu-da-wu-wei-jing-shen du-ren-du-shi (cultivate mindfulness and a righteous mindset, develop a fearless spirit, and liberate people in the world)'.¹⁶⁵ As Schober argues, stories in sacred biographies 'express salient and abstract religious principles' and are prototypes that 'inspire others to imitate in their own lives idealized expressions of religiosity.'¹⁶⁶ Ven. Xuyun's life as depicted in *Nianpu* seems to have been a communication of his comprehension of mindfulness. The linkages among sacrifice, no-self altruism, and mindfulness are abundantly illustrated in the sequence of events he experienced. The sufferings he faced during the Yunmen Incident are often conceived of by his disciples as one of his sacrifices: for the monastery, for its monastics, and even for Buddhism in general. This highlights the perceived value of mindfulness not merely as revealing a fearless spirit during suffering, but more importantly, as bringing social benefit to a wider community.

It is interesting to note that, while Western psychiatrists have criticised mindfulness as an 'inward-focused type of spirituality' that could become 'self-centred' and 'selfish',¹⁶⁷ Chan tradition emphasises that a master's lived experience informs a spirit of selflessness. More specifically, it is the concept of 'no-self' – an echo or embodiment of the Bodhisattva Path – that comes to the fore. Mindfulness, at least as revealed in Ven. Xuyun's lived experience of the solitary practice of meditation, is not narrowly focused on self-liberation, but also requires one's active involvement in liberating others. His diligent efforts, even in extreme old age, and fearless calmness amid misfortunes, are widely seen as further evidence that mindfulness –

¹⁶⁴ Hunn and Cen (1988).

¹⁶⁵ Ven. Jinghui (2016a, 250).

¹⁶⁶ Schober (1997, 2).

¹⁶⁷ Rudgard (accessed July 5, 2019).

considered as an inner power – is developed through the Bodhisattva Path.

Campo has pointed out that a few of Xuyun's dharma heirs 'have been instrumental in the reassertion of Buddhism in post-Mao China [...and] have maintained an unwavering commitment to the monasteries of their religious tradition'.¹⁶⁸ In the next section, we will look in depth at one such example from among Ven. Xuyun's disciples.

2.4 Ven. Foyuan

Ven. Foyuan, a former attendant and well-known disciple of Ven. Xuyun, whose life he defended during the Yunmen Incident, became abbot of Yunmen in 1953. Around that time, Ven. Foyuan also travelled with Ven. Xuyun to host Buddhist ceremonies and Chan meditation retreats in Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, and Hangzhou, recording his monk-teacher's dharma talks and later compiling them into a widely circulated book, *Xuyun Laoheshang Chanqi Kaishilu* (*The Dharma Talks of Ven. Xuyun in Chanqi*). Having witnessed how Ven. Xuyun dedicated all his energy to protecting Buddhism under difficult political circumstances, Ven. Foyuan emulated this example, risking his life to protect the mummified body of the sixth patriarch during the Cultural Revolution and restoring Chan tradition at Yunmen monastery after the opening-up era in 1980s.

Ven. Foyuan was born in Hunan Province in 1922, the seventh child of eleven born to a tenant-farming family. The 1930s and 1940s in China were exceptionally difficult, marked by 'massive amounts of premature death' due to diseases, opium, starvation, and military and governmental oppression.¹⁶⁹ Politically, China became fragmented as the Nationalist government and Communist forces fought each other between 1927 and 1937. In his childhood, Ven. Foyuan provided his parents with various kinds of labour, both on their farm and in gold mines.¹⁷⁰ Fong suggested that these childhood experiences of hard work and other hardships

¹⁶⁸ Campo (2019, 135).

¹⁶⁹ Watt (2013, 299).

¹⁷⁰ Yunmen Monastery (2019a, 5).

during wartime developed his self-reliance, hard work, and thrift.¹⁷¹ In his youth, Ven. Foyuan is also said to have learned Confucian philosophy by heart, and to have been especially inspired by the *Lunyu* (*Analects of Confucius*) and its figure of the sage.

In 1941, aged nineteen, he was tonsured by his uncle, Ven. Zhihui, at Qixia Si in the north of Hunan Province, and in 1946 was ordained by Ven. Zhenqing at Fuyang Si. As a young monk, it is said that he was very quick to learn Buddhist chanting and to adjust to the monastic rules.¹⁷² Despite such talents, his studies did not go smoothly due to the prevailing wars and political turmoil. During the Japanese invasion of 1937-45 and post-war clashes between the Communists and Nationalists, he studied Buddhism at several places for short periods of time: Zhusheng Si in 1942, and Hengyang Seminary, Nantai Si, and Jiaoshan Seminary, all in 1946. When the PRC was established and the *tugai* targeted and killed landlords as ‘treacherous merchants and reactionaries’,¹⁷³ Buddhist temples – irrespective of their size and wealth – were also attacked; and many monks left them, or committed suicide if such escape attempts failed.¹⁷⁴

In January 1951, Ven. Foyuan left Yiyang in Hunan and fled to Yunmen in Guangdong, 550 kilometres to the south. During the subsequent Yunmen Incident, whilst Ven. Xuyun was being tortured, Ven. Foyuan and 26 other monks were held in custody for several months, during which they were treated very severely, some dying as a result.¹⁷⁵ Ven. Foyuan was finally released in May, and the following month formally received the *fajuan* (dharma-scrolls)¹⁷⁶ from Ven. Xuyun, thus becoming the thirteenth-generation legitimate successor of the Yunmen School. It was at this time, also, that he was given the dharma name by which he

¹⁷¹ Feng (2012, 17).

¹⁷² Wen (2012).

¹⁷³ Chen and Chen (1953, 11).

¹⁷⁴ Yunmen Monastery (2014a, 1527).

¹⁷⁵ Yunmen Monastery (2019a, 7).

¹⁷⁶ According to Welch (1963, 93), *fajuan* ‘is a religious genealogy...[which] testifies to the authenticity of lineage and the rights of inheritance.’ The genealogical chart traces the generation-wise transmission of the dharma from the Buddha to Mahākāśyapa, down to the one who received the scroll.

is now generally known, which literally means ‘the origin of Buddhahood’. It is said that he was greatly inspired by how Ven. Xuyun had faced the Yunmen Incident.¹⁷⁷

Ven. Foyuan’s installation as abbot of Yunmen took place on 13 July 1953.¹⁷⁸ He recalled that after Ven. Xuyun left Yunmen and headed to Zhenru Si to restore it, monastics gradually left Yunmen, until there were fewer than 30 left there. Under such challenging circumstances, Ven. Foyuan as the new leader of Yunmen insisted on leading all monastics in the performance of daily religious practices, and restored the traditions of *chanqi* and *nongchan*.¹⁷⁹ In 1958, when the Anti-Rightist Campaign broke out, he was again arrested as being ‘anti-Communist’ and a ‘class enemy’, but this time it was decided that he needed to be ‘re-educated’.¹⁸⁰ He was jailed for three years, followed by eighteen years of hard labour and torture.¹⁸¹ A story still circulates that, during his incarceration, he refused to violate the Bodhisattva precept of not eating meat; and that in response, a warden used an iron stick to forcibly open his mouth and feed it to him, doing permanent damage to his facial nerves.¹⁸²

The ten-year Cultural Revolution brought near-fatal damage to all religions in China, and the number of Buddhist and Daoist temples dropped from more than 60,000 to around 8,000 during that time.¹⁸³ Amid terrible suffering, many Buddhist monks simply gave up hope and disrobed, but Ven. Foyuan did not falter in his vows; and his brave act of saving a sacred

¹⁷⁷ Yunmen Monastery (2019a, 17).

¹⁷⁸ After Ven. Xuyun left Yunmen, no one wanted to take up the responsibility of leading the temple. Thus, all monks at Yunmen decided to draw a lottery in front of Weituo Bodhisattva’s statue to determine the next abbot, and the lot came to Ven. Foyuan.

¹⁷⁹ Yunmen Monastery (2014a, 2193).

¹⁸⁰ According to *Foyuan Laohe Shang Fahui*, it was believed that the act of Ven. Foyuan reporting the Yunmen Incident to the vice-president of PRC Li Jishen (1885-1959) in Beijing had offended the local authority and became a remote cause of his imprisonment (cited in Liu 2012).

¹⁸¹ In his diary, he wrote the following: ‘In the 21 years of my life at Nanhua Temple...every corner was covered by my footprints and every land had my sweat and blood...we did hard labour during the daytime and endured violent abuses and harassment in night time... One time, a “struggle session” (a form of public humiliation) was held and a large crowd gathered at the temple. I was [among other local officials] taken to the stone staircase of the Four Heavenly Hall. Some [of us] were beaten and I was punched by a young man and he broke my ribs. Afterwards, I was dragged and kicked by four men...’ Yunmen Monastery (2014a, 2188).

¹⁸² Fieldnote recorded in the summer of 2016.

¹⁸³ National Religious Affairs Administration of the People’s Republic of China (accessed May 12, 2020).

Chan Buddhist relic was widely recognised as an extraordinary contribution to the Chan lineage.¹⁸⁴

Already in poor health in 1979, when the Chinese Communist government announced his rehabilitation,¹⁸⁵ Ven. Foyuan returned to the dilapidated Yunmen Temple at once. As he recalled:

When I arrived in Yunmen, all the constructions which the grand master [Ven. Xuyun] had built were gone during the Cultural Revolution. Buddhist sutras were burned and Buddha statues were demolished. There were only three monks staying there. The west wing of Yunmen Monastery was completely gone and the buildings near the main hall were dilapidated and they almost collapsed [...] everything had to start from the beginning[.]¹⁸⁶

Ven. Fuyuan led the remaining monks in the rebuilding of the temple, despite the fragility of his health, closely emulating his teacher Ven. Xuyun.¹⁸⁷ The reconstruction of Yunmen was completed in 1994. As well as the buildings, he strove to restore all the practices that had been promoted by Ven. Xuyun but discontinued during the Cultural Revolution. These included the practice of *chuanjie* (precept transmission); promoting the education of the *sangha*; preaching the dharma; hosting *chanqi*; and participating in *nongchan*. Some of his disciples vividly recalled how, even after he turned eighty, Ven. Foyuan continued to work on the farm, planting rice seeds, reaping, and engaging in various menial chores. In the last few years of his life, he would go to the paddy fields in his wheelchair and watch his disciples transplant rice and perform their other farm work.

One story told about Ven. Foyuan indicates the high level of his cultivation of mindfulness, even in time of sickness. It holds that when he had a major brain operation, known to have caused him great discomfort, he still managed to get up at midnight and quietly sit in a

¹⁸⁴ The Sixth Patriarch Huineng's body relic is now enshrined at Nanhua Temple. For details of Ven. Foyuan saving the relic, see Yunmen Monastery (2014a, 2188-90).

¹⁸⁵ See Appendix One: Photo 1.

¹⁸⁶ Yunmen Monastery (2014a, 1528).

¹⁸⁷ The Chinese government initially allocated 400,000 CNY dollars, which was insufficient for the work to carry on. To raise more funds, he wrote over 370 letters to Ven. Xuyun's lay patrons and disciples in China as well as to those overseas. He eventually extended the layout of the original temple and added meditation hall, dining hall, drum, and bell halls. See Liu (2012, 106-7).

meditation posture. When asked to rest by his disciples, he replied, ‘let the pain be as it is, I will do my meditation.’ Similarly, a nun in Guangzhou, Ven. Chuanfa, once said to the octogenarian Ven. Foyuan, ‘You have been through the suffering of many tortures and being in jail. Has life been short or long for you?’ According to her, Ven. Foyuan replied, ‘It was just like a flash of time’.¹⁸⁸ In saying this, he seemed to be using his own experience of suffering to show his disciple that, compared to one’s unwavering true mind, the troubles of the world were just a fleeting cloud, and that every moment in life is one in which to practise mindfulness, irrespective of negative circumstances.

According to Weber, the term charisma is ‘a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as someone endowed with supernatural or superhuman qualities, or at least with specifically exceptional powers.’¹⁸⁹ And for Barnes, ‘charisma originates from an inner, dynamic force of the leader’s personality.’¹⁹⁰ The widespread and intense appeal of the Chan masters focused on in this chapter resides in their demonstration of a means of transcending suffering, involving not only moral integrity but also their meditative powers. In other words, the sufferings that the Chan masters experienced, as narrated in their biographies, illuminate the core of their charisma. On the one hand, such charisma sets up an idealised image of extraordinary spiritual power; but on the other, as Lindholm argues, ‘the performance of the leader reflects and amplifies the desires of the followers, and stimulates a self-obliterating fusion in a charismatic union’.¹⁹¹ In other words, it fires readers’ imaginations and fills them with hope for their own release from the struggles of life.

The role played by suffering in Chan masters’ biographies is linked to the concept of

¹⁸⁸ Yunmen Monastery (2010b, 258).

¹⁸⁹ Weber (1947).

¹⁹⁰ Barnes (1978, 1).

¹⁹¹ Lindholm (accessed November 6, 2020, 211).

asceticism, one of the three key features of Chinese Buddhist hagiography.¹⁹² In Kieschnick's view, asceticism defines a monk, setting him apart from secular society, and is manifested in diverse forms of monkhood.¹⁹³ He questioned why ascetic practice was so appealing from the perspective of Western asceticism – drawing in particular on the work of William James, Joseph Swain, and Peter Brown – and assumed that self-sacrificial acts were made by monks for the purpose of gaining merit, or future rebirth: 'they attacked their senses not because they wanted to destroy themselves, but because they wanted to be better.'¹⁹⁴ It seems to me, however, that to focus reductively on the endurance of suffering as a means of gaining personal religious rewards would be to ignore the forces at work in the wider monastic community, or at worst, the Buddhist tradition as a whole. Biographical narratives of ascetic practices and self-sacrifice on the part of Chan masters have a powerful impact, defining both monastic duty and goals for specific moral communities. As such, these masters' experiences of suffering not only reaffirm their own moral authority, but also urge their disciples to practise diligently and to be disciplined in their own monastic lives. Moreover, their practices carried out an educational function, implying that the key spirit of mindfulness is not shying away from pain and misery, but facing and transcending them.

So far, we have tried to capture the biographical narratives of two Chan masters who lived through radical social change in Mainland China. Their stories present a master-and-disciple relationship as well as a direct-succession relationship. Barnes regards it as crucial to compare the founder of a religious tradition and that person's immediate successor, and holds that 'charismatic leaders differ significantly from their successors'.¹⁹⁵ However, based on the findings of the present study, we can identify many similar patterns in both the leadership and the mindfulness teaching of Ven. Xuyun and Ven. Foyuan at Yunmen, despite considerable

¹⁹² The three features are asceticism, thaumaturgy, and scholarship (Kieschnick 1997, 17).

¹⁹³ Kieschnick (*ibid.*, 58).

¹⁹⁴ Kieschnick (*ibid.*, 77).

¹⁹⁵ Barnes (1978, 10-15).

variation in the complex of social factors around them. The next section analyses the major aspects of the life of Ven. Wei-Chueh, another dharma heir of Ven. Xuyun, who was born in Mainland China but spent his entire monkhood in Taiwan. I will then juxtapose these three Chan masters and identify similarities in their embodiment of mindfulness.

2.5 Ven. Wei-Chueh

The Taiwan Strait ‘has remained one of the most worrisome flash points on the globe since the Second World War.’¹⁹⁶ Despite the extreme political tension between Mainland China and Taiwan, Ven. Wei-Chueh had a vision of promoting cross-Strait peace,¹⁹⁷ preserving Chinese traditional heritage, and propagating *zushi chan* (Patriarchal Chan Buddhism) in Taiwan. In contrast to the members of the three largest Buddhist organisations in Taiwan, Ven. Wei-Chueh neither projected himself a proponent of Humanistic Buddhism, nor declared that he rejected it. However, I would argue that his Buddhist teaching approach was more ‘other-worldly’ oriented and driven than Humanistic Buddhism’s ‘this-worldly’ oriented teaching approaches would readily allow.¹⁹⁸ He identified himself as the dharma heir of Ven. Xuyun,¹⁹⁹ and focused on revitalizing Chan Buddhist ideas about ‘enlightenment’ by using modern terms and an innovative teaching system of his own devices. At the same time, he worked on extending the earlier vision of Ven. Xuyun such as in the practice of *chuanjie* (triple-platform ordination transmission; see Chapter 3), of *chanqi* (see Chapter 5), and of *nongchan* (see Chapter 4) to promote the ‘other-worldly’ monastic identity.

Ven. Wei-Chueh was born in Sichuan Province in 1928 and, like Ven. Foyuan, was

¹⁹⁶ Jiang (2017, 39).

¹⁹⁷ Chung Tai has held several cross-strait events to pray for peace and no military conflicts across the strait. For example, Ven. Wei-Chueh once planted a peace tree with the Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, Ye Xiaowen (B.1950), in February 2009 during a Peace Blessing ceremony. Other similar events for promoting cross-strait peace were held on 24th December 2009 and 21st March 2010. See Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed November 11, 2020).

¹⁹⁸ For example, during *chanqi*, Ven. Wei-Chueh often told lay participants about the importance of eradicating sexual desire and freeing themselves from the suffering of samsāra, rather than telling them how to have a happy lay life.

¹⁹⁹ The other famous heir in Taiwan is Ven. Sheng-Yen (1931-2009), the founder of Dharma Drum.

deeply imbued with Confucian philosophy in his youth. After the Communist victory of 1949, he joined some two million other refugees in following the troops of the KMT government to Taiwan, becoming a monk there in 1953. He was tonsured at Keelung Shifang Dajue Chansi and ordained by one of Ven. Xuyun's prominent disciples, Ven. Lingyuan (1902-1988).²⁰⁰ As such, Ven. Wei-Chueh is a lineal successor of the Linji School of Chan Buddhism that was introduced from Mainland China to Taiwan and a founder of the large Chung Tai community. Ven. Wei-Chueh is almost synonymous with Chung Tai. Under his 30-year leadership, Chung Tai Chan Monastery grew into a gigantic monastic order in Taiwan, with about a hundred branches internationally. According to his memorial stele inscription, he tonsured around two thousand monastic disciples and taught hundreds of thousands of lay followers.²⁰¹

There is relatively little information about his early years, though once he joined a monastery in his mid-thirties, he is said to have been very diligent in his spiritual practice, and to have fulfilled his designated duties.²⁰² In 1970s, he commenced a solitary ascetic life deep in the mountains near Wanli, in the north-western part of Taiwan, where he practised meditation for more than ten years to advance his spiritual cultivation. It is said that he lived in a small hut without any power supply, wore torn clothes, and sustained himself only on pickled chilli and vegetables. When a local road was constructed in the mid-1980s, people started to hear about his ascetic existence, and were impressed by his calm and resolute temperament when they met him in person. Over time, his reputation drew increasing numbers of visitors who, having come to consult him about Buddhism, became his devout followers. Deciding that the time was ripe to spread the Chan dharma in Taiwan, Ven. Wei-Chueh accepted his followers' invitation to step out of his solitude to commence teaching, and commenced construction of the Lingquan

²⁰⁰ Ven. Lingyuan was tonsured in 1933 by Ven. Xuyun, a key figure who brought Ven. Xuyun's Chan lineage to Taiwan in 1953 and established Shifang Dajue Chan Monastery in Keelung, north-eastern Taiwan.

²⁰¹ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed November 31, 2019).

²⁰² After several years of study, he left the Great Enlightenment Chan Monastery in Keelung and went on retreats in Jixiang Temple in Yilan, Yuanming Temple in Hsinchu, and Lantau Island in Hong Kong before continuing his ascetic life in Wanli. See Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed September 28, 2020).

Monastery on the site of his former meditation hut. In some respects, modern narratives about the image of Ven. Wei-Chueh parallel classic hagiographic accounts of the images of Chan masters dating back to the Tang dynasty. As Heine and Wright explain, ‘poets and writers, as well as statesmen and even emperors, travelled great distances to meet the famous teachers, to witness firsthand their unusual forms of discourse and behaviour, and hear the teachings and practices they initiated’.²⁰³

The key turning point in Ven. Wei-Chueh’s monastic path took place in 1987, when the state of martial law that had prevailed in Taiwan since 1949 was finally lifted. According to Jiang, this shift meant that Buddhists and Buddhist organisations could enjoy greater mobility, freedom, and scope for development than before.²⁰⁴ Since that time, too, Taiwan’s population has exhibited a growing interest in spirituality, which also coincided with – and appears to have been a response to – unprecedented material prosperity. In any case, from the late 1980s, Taiwanese Buddhism experienced a flowering and increased diversity, as the state-controlled Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) began to cede power to newly established Buddhist organisations.²⁰⁵

Like Ven. Xuyun and Ven. Foyuan, Ven. Wei-Chueh oversaw temple-construction work himself. To reduce construction costs, rather than hiring professionals, he led his disciples to participate in the work, which involved carrying heavy bricks to build walls, stirring cement, and clearing large stones from the site. It is said that Ven. Wei-Chueh continued working even after his disciples had gone to sleep; and on rainy days, when construction was forced to pause, he spent hours walking alone from the mountains to a nearby town to collect alms for the project.

Although endurance of initial hardship and physical tiredness are hardly unique to the

²⁰³ Heine and Wright (2010, v).

²⁰⁴ Jiang (1995, 511-27).

²⁰⁵ Such as Fo Guang Shan, Tzu Chi, and Dharma Drum.

lives of Chan masters, these events emerge as major modes of instruction or communication, illustrating ‘manual labour as an essential part of [... Chan Buddhism’s] monastic paradigm, as well as an integral aspect of its comprehensive program of spiritual cultivation.’²⁰⁶ Eventually, Ven. Wei-Chueh and his disciples completed a small meditation hall and held *chanqi* for the first time.²⁰⁷ From this we can see that, from the beginning, he led by reference to the *chanqi* tradition, and this laid the spiritual foundation of the Chan style of Chung Tai.

It is commonly held that a real Chan master must ‘have personally experienced the suchness of “just this” [the true mind]’ and the experiences of enlightenment ‘in order to be able to state [it] as the heart of his teaching’.²⁰⁸ Among the encounter-dialogues or stories attributed to Ven. Wei-Chueh, his personal appeal lies most obviously in his capacity to expound the very elusive Chan dharma in ways that are appropriate to the spiritual capacities of his audience, and to skilfully guide his disciples to realise the dynamic of the suchness of the true mind through daily interactions (for further details, see Section 2.6, below).

Ven. Wei-Chueh’s image as an ascetic Chan master with a deep meditative temperament, hiding himself away in the mountains, presented a stark contrast to Taiwan’s fast-paced society, with its booming economic and material prosperity. The manifestation of his extraordinary teaching on Chan Buddhism in *chanqi* attracted people from all walks of life, including elite government officials, entrepreneurs, doctors, and so on. For example, Chen Lu-An, the Secretary of Defence, became a disciple of Ven. Wei-Chueh, and his son was later ordained.²⁰⁹ And Lee Chu-Yuan, the architect of Chung Tai Chan Monastery as well as of Taipei 101, reportedly the world’s tallest skyscraper as of 2010, began studying intensively under Ven. Wei-Chueh in 1992, and has been a very devoted supporter ever since. He described Ven. Wei-

²⁰⁶ Pocesi (2010, 16).

²⁰⁷ It was attended by about 20 monastic and lay participants. Since then, *chanqi* has been held regularly. See Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2016, 14).

²⁰⁸ Leighton (2010, 41).

²⁰⁹ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (1993, 2).

Chueh as ‘a treasure mine’ and was eager to learn from him as much as he could.²¹⁰ As Lingquan Monastery soon struggled to accommodate its rapidly growing population of monastics and lay visitors, Ven. Wei-Chueh decided to establish a large modern Chan monastery building at Puli in central Taiwan.²¹¹

From the very beginning, Ven. Wei-Chueh felt that Chung Tai should be a place where both monastics and laity could cultivate Chan practices.²¹² In his words, ‘The Buddha’s teachings are based on human beings, human beings are based on human mind, and human mind is based on awakening.’²¹³ The pervasive theme in his propagation of Chan teaching in the modern world is education, which can be subdivided into three aspects: monastic education, social education, and school education. In 1989, he established Chung Tai Buddhist Institute to develop a team of well-qualified monastics who could deliver Chan dharma to a wider society. This was followed three years later by the setting up of the first *jingshe* (branches) to disseminate meditation practices,²¹⁴ and in 1998, planning commenced for Pu Tai School, to instil the next generation of children aged seven to twelve with Buddhist compassion and ‘right views’. His insights about awakening one’s true nature were embodied in each of these three kinds of education, and his philosophy of education was fuelled ultimately by his religious vision of guiding ordinary people to sainthood.

To reach his aim of establishing ‘the Chung Tai World’ and spreading Chan teachings far beyond the monastery’s original mountain site, Ven. Wei-Chueh travelled around Taiwan to raise funds tirelessly, hosting numerous Buddhist ceremonies and meditation retreats, and

²¹⁰ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (1994, 2).

²¹¹ It is a town in central Taiwan known for excellent air and water quality, and is conveniently located for practitioners coming from both north and south of the country. Ven. Wei-Chueh regards Puli as a suitable place for spiritual cultivation.

²¹² The data is based on a private meeting with Ven. Wei-Chueh in 2012.

²¹³ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed October 15, 2020).

²¹⁴ A lay devotee Xie Guilin donated his house and land for the site of the first Chung Tai branch, Puguang Jingshe. Notably, in Chung Tai’s social education system, the knowledge of Chan Buddhism and meditation is only delivered from monastic to laity. Each branch is headed by Chung Tai monastics and provides a series of beginner, intermediate, and sutra study classes.

giving dharma talks. The construction costs for Chung Tai Chan monastery were approximately NT\$3 billion (nearly US\$100 million), an astonishing sum to have raised from general donations in the absence of any government support. To the surprise of many, Chung Tai Chan monastery was completed after three years of planning and seven years of construction. Ven. Jian-Mai, abbess of one of Chung Tai's branches, recalled that the master once arrived at her branch at 11 p.m. for a ceremony, and spent the next seven hours rehearsing. Nevertheless, she said, he showed up in great spirits at 9 a.m., ready to host the whole ceremony.²¹⁵ Ven. Jian-Ying, one of his nun disciples, similarly recalled being on duty cleaning the hall at 3.30 a.m., and seeing the master, who had just finishing patrolling it without sleep. After breakfast at 6.30 the same morning, she saw him again, heading to work, prompting her to wonder: does a Chan master not need to rest?²¹⁶ Indeed, many monastic and lay followers have expressed curiosity about why Chan masters appear not to feel tired after decades of religious devotion.

Chung Tai literature often stresses that Ven. Wei-Chueh's tireless efforts to construct temples and teach Chan dharma were driven by his strongly held Bodhisattva vow to lead sentient beings towards enlightenment. His exemplary acts demonstrated a strong connection among bearing up under physical and mental tiredness, compassion, and spiritual cultivation, which in turn mobilised and motivated more followers to follow in his footsteps. One by one, many Chung Tai branches were established as more lay donors offered money, land and other property to facilitate Ven. Wei-Chueh's spreading of the dharma, and many also donated their time as volunteers. Thus, Chung Tai grew very quickly into one of Taiwan's largest Buddhist institutions.

As briefly noted above, the establishment of Chung Tai coincided with the period of the 'Taiwan Economic Miracle' (1980s-2000), during which Taiwan's people expressed growing

²¹⁵ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2018a, 34-35).

²¹⁶ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (ibid., 43).

interest in spirituality and life's meaning.²¹⁷ The ensuing religious vibrancy was reflected in the country's number of registered temples, both Buddhist and Taoist, which increased from 3,661 in 1930, to 5,531 in 1981, and 9,707 in 2001.²¹⁸ It was recorded in 1992 that 4.86 million people frequently went to Buddhist temples, and by the turn of the century, this group exceeded five million.²¹⁹ The middle class played a major role in the development of Buddhism in Taiwan,²²⁰ but according to my own observations, Chung Tai's lay followers came from all walks of life. Most of them learned about the monastery through attending free meditation classes held in its branches around Taiwan, after which they attended *chanqi* or its other Buddhist ceremonies. Through such participation, many of them then became Ven. Wei-Chueh's lay disciples and supported him in his construction efforts.

The process of building Chung Tai Monastery was beset by various challenges, one of the biggest being a deadly 7.6 Mw earthquake that struck on 21 September 1999.²²¹ The monastery, still under construction, was at the epicentre but stood firm – an outcome widely ascribed to Ven. Wei-Chueh's careful and sophisticated oversight of the construction process, and his insistence that the monastery structures be stronger than local building regulations would have allowed. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, before any support from the outside world had arrived, the monastic community set up an emergency centre to rescue victims from local villages. Despite being victims of the disaster themselves, and facing fearsomely powerful aftershocks, Ven. Wei-Chueh and his disciples prioritised their rescue efforts to disconnected and remote areas that other charitable groups would likely be unable to reach, sending aid materials, clearing roads, and providing hot vegetarian meals and medical care. Soon afterwards, all branches of Chung Tai across Taiwan came together to carry out this

²¹⁷ Jones (1999).

²¹⁸ Yang (2008, 43).

²¹⁹ Chandler (2005, 182).

²²⁰ For a study of lay Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan, see Verlag (2017).

²²¹ It is the second-deadliest earthquake in Taiwan's recorded history, after the one in 1935. It killed 2,415 people and left 11,305 injured. See UDN (accessed September 30, 2020).

relief work. According to male lay devotees who went by truck to help distribute aid supplies, the smell of corpses filled the air throughout the town of Puli. Much heavy construction equipment from the main Chung Tai construction site was also dispatched to support rescue efforts.²²² For many, these distressing circumstances highlighted the power of a religious community to come together, and exemplified its social function. Ven. Wei-Chueh later held a special ceremony to pray for the victims, both deceased and survivors, and raised a total of more than NT\$70 million to support the latter.²²³

Many stories in circulation claim that Ven. Wei-Chueh miraculously foresaw the coming natural disaster. One of his earliest nun disciples, for example, told me that he had spontaneously visited the branch where she worked and showed his care about their lives a few weeks before the earthquake. On that occasion, she said, Ven. Wei-Chueh told her that she should change the location of her bed. Having complied with that request, she was saved from being crushed when a water tower collapsed onto the place where her bed had originally been.²²⁴ Such demonstrations of supernatural power are a popular trope in ancient hagiography, which often interprets them as resulting from one's spiritual achievement. However, in contrast to the autobiography of Ven. Xuyun, which is replete with supposed manifestations of his miraculous abilities, the mystical capabilities and experiences of Ven. Wei-Chueh and Ven. Foyuan tend to be downplayed by their disciples, presumably to avoid accusations of superstition.

Despite the major setback of the earthquake, the construction of Chung Tai was eventually completed, and many of his disciples expected that Ven. Wei-Chueh would rest. However, he quickly shifted his focus to the problems and future prospects of Taiwanese education, in particular via Pu Tai, which he hoped would provide an ideal model for 'education

²²² The description is based on my memory about what I heard personally as a lay person in a Chung Tai's branch in Kaohsiung in 1999.

²²³ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2016, 125).

²²⁴ This private conversation happened in 2008.

of awakening' (*jue-de-jiaoyu*). His motto for his version of education reform reads: 'Buddhism as the foundation, Chinese classics as the substance, worldly knowledge as the means.'²²⁵ Since the 1990s, Taiwan's educational reforms have been widely considered a failure by teachers, parents, and industry alike,²²⁶ with critics suggesting that it neither made students more competitive internationally nor improved the country's economic development. Some, like Wang, went so far as to suggest that the failure of higher education resulted in the moral decline of Taiwanese society.²²⁷ The government and many Buddhist organisations concentrated on establishing new tertiary institutions, raising the total number of universities and technical colleges from 104 in 1980 to 154 in 2001,²²⁸ but the rapid expansion of higher education resulted in sacrifices to its quality, and many relatively recent university graduates have failed to live up to the expectations of their employers and potential employers. Ven. Wei-Chueh, in contrast, focused on the youngest members of society, starting from year one of primary school, based on his assessment that early childhood lays the foundation for individual personality and thus, of the future development of the nation. In addition, when the Taiwanese national school curriculum was criticised for espousing a de-Sinicisation policy, i.e., aiming at the elimination of Chinese traditional culture,²²⁹ Ven. Wei-Chueh's emphasis on teaching the value of Chinese classics was welcomed by many as an attempt to reverse that trend. He expected students to enhance their moral awareness through emulating the images of past Chinese saints, and also encouraged them to practise Buddhist meditation to calm their minds. From this perspective, schooling emerges as a critical platform for the propagation of Chan mindfulness. Ven. Wei-Chueh also advocated that children study four foreign languages to enhance their international competitiveness, since Taiwanese people's generally low English proficiency has been seen as

²²⁵ Pu Tai Elementary School (accessed April 8, 2020).

²²⁶ See Jiang (accessed May 19, 2020) and UDN (accessed August 19, 2020).

²²⁷ Wang (accessed June 15, 2020).

²²⁸ Tang (accessed August 17, 2020).

²²⁹ Maxon (accessed April 27, 2020).

disadvantaging them in the global employment marketplace.²³⁰ In a speech to Pu Tai students, he referred to learning as ‘the foundation for social contribution’, and encouraged them to develop themselves through continuous self-reflection, and to work to acquire multiple kinds of knowledge.²³¹ In this respect, Pu Tai education represents a model of how a Chan master has applied secular approaches to realise and fulfil his religious Bodhisattva ideal.

Ven. Wei-Chueh’s final project was the building of the Chung Tai World Museum.²³² Described as the ‘Taiwanese Musée du Louvre’, it exhibits mainly Chinese Buddhist artefacts spanning a period of two millennia, alongside South Asian, Southeast Asian and Tibetan Buddha statues.²³³ He passed away in 2016, four months before the museum opened, but I was told that he continued to patrol its construction site even in his final days. For him, the museum was not only an attempt to connect Taiwanese society with its Buddhist history, spirit and traditions, but also a vehicle capable of carrying visitors on a sacred journey into their heart. Chung Tai’s official history records that, at ‘the moment of seeing these Buddha statues with concentration and calmness, [visitors] will distinguish their vexation and give rise to faith in Buddhism and plant a seed of enlightenment.’²³⁴ As Jameson has argued, ‘a museum gallery, though not a consecrated ritual space, can still potentially be a place for spiritual engagement’.²³⁵ From this viewpoint, building the museum was probably a means for Ven. Wei-Chueh and Chung Tai to disseminate, whether directly or indirectly, the idea of mindfulness to those from outside the Buddhist tradition.

Ven. Wei-Chueh also came in for some criticism, most notably connected with two

²³⁰ Everington (accessed April 18, 2020); Lin (accessed April 23, 2020).

²³¹ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed April 17, 2020).

²³² Ven. Wei-Chueh’s interest in preserving the Chinese Buddhist cultural heritage could be traced back to the mid-1990s, when in 1996, he set up a development committee for ‘Chung Tai Buddhist culture and art’ with the support of Taiwanese artists and calligraphers. He then sent several of his monastic disciples to pursue higher academic degrees in archaeology abroad, and now, Chung Tai monks who have specialised knowledge in Buddhist art supervise the museum. See Chung Tai Chan Monastery (1996).

²³³ The construction costs for Chung Tai museum were approximately NT\$2.8 billion (nearly US\$ 90 million), and the funding came from Chung Tai’s lay members. See Yang (accessed June 21, 2020).

²³⁴ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2016, 101).

²³⁵ Jameson (2015, 3).

events. The first of these was the Chung Tai tonsure incident (*tidu fengbo*) of 1 September 1996.²³⁶ When hundreds of university students decided to enter the monastic life at Chung Tai, their parents became very angry and came to the monastery to convince them to return home. However, the monastery stood by the students' decisions to renounce, as a reflection of their right to choose their own spiritual path. This conflict aroused great public concern about the monastery and generated negative attitudes towards Chung Tai.

The second incident was the obvious political stance that Ven. Wei-Chueh took in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Of all the activities in Taiwanese society, politics is arguably the most controversial for Buddhist monks and nuns to engage in;²³⁷ nevertheless, he called on his disciples not to vote for Chen Shui-bian, the Democratic Progressive Party candidate.²³⁸ This behaviour led him to be labelled as a political monk. However, Ven. Wei-Chueh deeply believed that these elections were a pivotal moment for Taiwan's future survival, and that voting for his preferred candidate was crucial to easing people's suffering.

What these two incidents equally illustrate is the tense relationship between the monastery and the general public. Ven. Wei-Chueh's presidential election stance reflected conflicting views on the future of Taiwan, and the tonsure incident, an ongoing battle between traditional Chinese family values and individuals' aspiration for renunciation. As Yu suggests, 'the public outcry reflected the traditional view that to become a nun represents a sort of failure.'²³⁹ In the eyes of Chung Tai's monastics and other followers, Ven. Wei-Chueh was willing to sacrifice his own reputation to support the students' life decisions, and to express his deep concern about the political direction the country was taking. To his disciples, this was an

²³⁶ DeVido (2010, 128).

²³⁷ Ven. Hsing Yun, the founder of Foguangshan, has also received some criticism on his comments on Chinese unification and at times is labelled as 'a political monk'. See Jerryson (2017, 20).

²³⁸ He believed that voting for Chen Shui-bian would lead to an economic crisis, a break in the roots of Chinese culture, a strain in relations between Taiwan and the sea, and a negative impact on the draft religious law on Buddhism. In 2010, the Taiwanese court sentenced former president Chen Shui-bian to life imprisonment after finding him guilty of corruption. See Branigan (accessed July 2, 2020).

²³⁹ Yu (2013, 29).

expression of the Bodhisattva path, in which the spirit of courage and non-self were ultimately embodied, and perhaps also an echo of fearless and altruistic spirit of mindfulness that Ven. Xuyun had expressed.

All three masters' hagiographical images continue to proliferate in their followers' discourse, and to circulate in books, videos, and events, all providing us with clues regarding the Chan 'path of mindfulness.'²⁴⁰ They all tend to share a view that the authenticity of Buddhist understanding and spiritual achievement are demonstrated through hardship and suffering. The common thread in the hagiographic images of the three masters I have focused on here is that they retained remarkable physical and mental power despite great age and ill-health. This seems to imply that an individual's boundless energy is often seen as evidence of his/her deep meditative achievement and deep realisation of Buddha nature. This echoes Leighton's comment on 'Chan/Zen images of life arising from stillness, the revival of spirit promoted by *samādhi* practice', whereby '[s]uchness connects with the source of creative energy.'²⁴¹ Doctrinally, when Buddhists teach about the empty nature of one's body and emotion, their demonstrated freedom from these challenges – seemingly unbearable to ordinary people – seems powerfully to show their spiritual transcendence of these mundane obstacles.

The biographies of the three Chan masters present them as embodying a religious ideal, which mediates between idealised models of ancient enlightened masters and readers in the present time. As we have seen in this chapter, the idea of mindfulness as manifested in these Chan masters' hagiographic life accounts conveys a strong religious drive for the relief of the world, combining the Chinese cultural concept of *zhengqi*²⁴² with the Mahāyāna doctrine of the Bodhisattva Way. Their concern was not merely with the otherworldly pursuit of

²⁴⁰ 'The Path of Right Mindfulness', produced at Chung Tai, was a video commemorating the passing of Ven. Wei-Chueh.

²⁴¹ Leighton (2010, 53).

²⁴² The central idea of *Zhengqi* in Chinese classical philosophy, a kind of mental quality that a great man cultivates, was proposed by Zhou Gong (1042 BCE).

enlightenment; their Buddhist practices were also a means of dealing with the challenges and sufferings of this world, by demonstrating profound powers of concentration, endurance, and compassion, and their faith regarding the awakening of the mind was harnessed during physical labour. Most importantly, the spiritual legacies of these three Chan masters allowed their followers to envisage that their own personal suffering could also be removed through the practice of mindfulness.

2.6 Knowledge transmission and master-and-disciple relationships

As McRae has commented, ‘the most important aspect of spiritual cultivation takes place in the encounter between teacher and student.’²⁴³ The hagiographies of Ven. Foyuan and Ven. Wei-Chueh that remain in current circulation both focus on interaction between master and disciple, emphasising the inspirational nature of the master’s teachings, and – as we have seen – systematically omitting references to their supernatural capacities or experiences. During the first night of my first fieldwork visit to Yunmen, I had a three-hour talk with several monk informants, and noticed that their conversation was always about their master, Ven. Foyuan. One monk said,

[T]he founding master laid a solid foundation for the monastery. Learning directly from a Chan master who transmits teaching through his words and conduct is different to learning from literal reading of Buddhist texts. This is because some teachings cannot be fully described through writing books. The personal explanation given by a Chan master helps you feel very close to the ‘truth’ in the sutra, and the distance becomes very thin, like just a piece of paper away.²⁴⁴

This statement seems to highlight that Chan masters exert a function of bridging the gap between their students and the religious ‘truth’ they pursue, i.e., of transporting un-awakened beings towards the opposite shore, where awakening resides. In delivering this inner knowledge, Chan masters have demonstrated and adopted multiple, flexible forms of teaching.

²⁴³ McRae (2003, 7).

²⁴⁴ Fieldnote recorded on July 13, 2016.

According to Heine, ‘the Chan dialogue is a process of spiritual polishing, or of taking a mind that is rough around the edges and making it smooth, attentive, and useful.’²⁴⁵ In my own experience, Chan masters in both monasteries instructed their disciples not only through giving them sermons, but also by grasping every opportunity to respond to their problems, to advise them, and even to assess their progress during everyday monastic encounters. This informal mode of engagement was arguably the most powerful and persuasive tool in their teaching, and highly appreciated by their students.

However, it also gives rise to two important questions: Who will the students learn from after their Chan masters pass away? And how should the *continuous* nature of the tradition be maintained, given the inevitability of these breaks in the chain? As Poceski points out, ‘remembering, recording, and reconfiguring of the past were all essential elements in the broad historical processes’ that fashioned Chan Buddhism.²⁴⁶ My two focal monasteries have taken similar approaches to these issues: making efforts to record and transcribe the images, the words, and the acts of their deceased Chan masters in all kinds of forms,²⁴⁷ and expressing the hope that this will allow their teaching to pass to those who come later. In some respects, this process parallels the Buddhist Councils in which the Buddha’s words and deeds were composed into Buddhist texts more than two thousand years ago. In 2011, Yunmen Monastery published a volume to commemorate the second anniversary of Ven. Foyuan’s passing, titled *Yinshui Siyuan*, which recorded the master’s life story and revealed how closely he interacted with his disciples. One year later, a book called *Fohai Xunyuan* was published, presenting 365 stories of encounters between the same master and his disciples. And in 2019, on the tenth

²⁴⁵ Heine (accessed July 30, 2020).

²⁴⁶ Poceski (2010, 7).

²⁴⁷ Ven. Wei-Chueh’s relics are preserved at Chung Tai Chan monastery, where a dark-red marble stupa stands in the garden area with a stone inscription telling the spiritual legacy of his life. Every year, over ten thousand people attend his memorial ceremony. Similarly, at the Yunmen Temple, the magnificent memorials halls for Ven. Xuyun and Ven. Foyuan stand side by side. Many personal items once used by Foyuan, including his robes, walking stick, wheelchair, letters, and a piece of bloodstained cloth, are exhibited to disclose his life of hardship and sacrifice.

anniversary of his passing, an exquisite hand-painted book depicting his life and key interactions with his disciples was produced.

Likewise, stories of encounters between Ven. Wei-Chueh and his disciples have been collected and posted on Chung Tai's official website. A booklet called *Chung Tai Koan*, published in an English-language version, contains 74 thought-provoking scenarios aimed at demonstrating how Ven. Wei-Chueh interacted with his students and taught them using various teaching styles. In 2018, two years after his passing, the monastery published a new book called *Douxing Changming*, containing 85 chapters written by 24 monk and nun disciples and 61 lay disciples. All these authors recalled personal stories of how they interacted with their monk teacher and learned from him.

Oral stories about Chan masters were also highly favoured and widely circulated among both monastics and laity in Chung Tai and Yunmen monasteries. Some practitioners memorised the teaching of a Chan master and repeated his instructions to others, which created a chain of transmission. These stories could be seen as contemporary Chan *koans*, demonstrating that the unique style of teaching delivered by the master, in every encounter dating back to early Chan Buddhism, was still very much part of the contemporary life of these monasteries. As Kapleau stresses, the personal encounter between master and disciple 'is not something to be taken lightly.'²⁴⁸ In my opinion, the material religious artefacts and story compilations of the lives of these masters reflect the fact that, in the eyes of their devotees, eminent Chan masters are both the driving forces behind others' spiritual quests, and living embodiments of a body of doctrine.

Despite both being dharma heirs of Ven. Xuyun, Ven. Foyuan and Ven. Wei-Chueh never met or interacted with each other. Nevertheless, their styles of teaching the Chan tradition were similar. Both spent abundant time and energy instructing their disciples, were described as both strict and compassionate, and were said to use tailor-made teaching styles when

²⁴⁸ Kapleau (1988, 48).

interacting with their students, to suit the individual natures of each one of them. Normally, in Chan monastic contexts, if a master adopts a very strict and severe teaching style, it is described as *banghe* ('stick and shout'). A soft and gentle method, in contrast, is described metaphorically as *gei-tang-chi* (giving 'lollipop' or 'candy'). There is an assumption that a beginner will need the 'candy'-style teaching, whereas more advanced learners can face *banghe*. In my own experience of living in Chung Tai, I had more than 20 'encounter' conversations with Ven. Wei-Chueh as his nun disciple. In these, he would usually show great patience and kindness to me, in contrast to his stricter mien when dealing with male disciples of any rank. In any case, however, he ensured that his disciples could meet with him on a daily basis, and I personally often met him outside: either when he was watching tree transplanting, or patrolling the monastery. I went to see him mostly if I had problems with monastic practice, and each conversation would last about half an hour. Despite the fact that he was very busy and had a never-ending schedule, when he talked to his disciples, he was always calm and appeared to be in no rush. I recorded one of my own experiences of talking with him as follows.

In May 2006, I had a private conversation with my monk teacher in a meeting room. Suddenly he lifted his cup to drink tea and asked me 'Where are you living now?' I was baffled by his question initially, as clearly, I was living in the same monastery as he was. Quickly, however, I realised that what he was asking was 'Where is your mind abiding now?' and that his question was to test if I really saw and rested in the recognition of the true nature of mind. However, I was not confident enough to propose my answer, and offered my room number as a perfunctory response. Hearing this, he appeared to choke on the tea. Yet, his question remained in my mind and became a useful reminder for my spiritual cultivation.

To me, this episode demonstrated that the interactions Chan masters have with their disciples reveal a strong pedagogical intention to liberate their listeners. Ven. Wei-Chueh's question to me could be understood as a spontaneous test of whether I, as a trainee, had attained a new spiritual level, or at least a clear insight into where the mind dwelled.

Zhu has suggested that 'there is a general inner logic' in these Chan encounters, and that 'every conceivable means of expression can be employed to test, confirm, or trigger

awakening to the original nature of human mind'.²⁴⁹ That is, what Chan masters strive to do in interpersonal encounters with their disciples can be understood as a transmission of a markedly inward-focused knowledge of the Chan view of the mind. They often skilfully improvise their teaching, drawing on momentary situations and any material available in the immediate vicinity.

Another example from Yunmen illustrates a Chan master's interactive teaching method.

A lay devotee asked Ven. Foyuan, 'What is *fannao* [affliction]?' Ven. Foyuan answered back, 'Yunmen Si and Nanhua Si, which one is better?' The devotee replied, 'Of course, Yunmen Si is better!' The master said, 'This is *fannao*!'²⁵⁰

Fannao, or *kleśa* in Sanskrit, comprises the mental states that cloud one's true nature and block one from reaching enlightenment. In this example, Ven. Foyuan spontaneously used down-to-earth language not only to resolve his disciple's confusion over the Buddhist term, but also show that one's *fannao* originates from discriminating thoughts and attachments. More importantly, the master pointed to that person's individual 'blind spots', and a point of entry for working on them. An example of a similar process involving Ven. Wei-Chueh is provided in this passage from *Chung Tai Koan*.

The monk student was in charge of the computer room and the air-conditioning in the room was always turned on for the normal operation of computers during hot days. The monk was said to be very responsible of his duty and hardworking. But one day he was annoyed about his work and felt unhappy. Ven. Wei-Chueh happened to pass by his window and asked him out of the blue: 'Is it very hot inside?' The student replied: 'no'. Then the master asked again, 'is it very hot inside?' The student felt very strange why his teacher asked this question twice by the fact that the computer room had air-conditioning. A few days later, the student understood that what the master referred to earlier was that the hotness was the annoyance in his mind.²⁵¹

This story seems to highlight Ven. Wei-Chueh's sharp observation and seemingly 'supernatural' capacity for knowing the inner state of his disciples, as evidenced by his prompt response to the monk student's '*fannao*' with a clue from which the intended guidance could be discovered by the disciple himself. This and similar stories suggest that the high point of the

²⁴⁹ Zhu (2011).

²⁵⁰ Yunmen Monastery (2012a, 145); both are famous temples in the same region.

²⁵¹ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2004, 58).

Chan master-disciple relationship is grounded in direct spiritual experience, in which the master does not necessarily extend his disciple's doctrinal or factual knowledge, but instead evokes real change in his/her inner thoughts and feelings. In this respect, a Chan master is like a mirror: helping disciples to see where they are most in need of change. This is further illustrated in another story from *Chung Tai Koan*:

A monk student liked to wear a sweater over his shoulders, which was not considered suitable for a male monastic member. One day Ven. Wei-Chueh dressed exactly like this monk student as he wrapped a sweater around his neck. The master's unusual appearance attracted a great deal of attention and discussion by his disciples. Afterwards, this monk student never wore a sweater in this way again.²⁵²

Tellingly, the Chan master's method of helping a monk student notice his own problematic conduct did not require the uttering of a single word. In fact, teaching non-verbally and by example has been a very powerful method in the Chan tradition. Moreover, the above examples revealed that the Chan discourse records known as *yulu* are not restricted to the historic archives of the Tang and Song dynasties, but continue to be made in contemporary monasteries, presumably on the grounds that – being tailor-made to both an individual student and an immediate situation – each encounter and its dialogue is unique and irreplaceable.

Many practitioners in Chung Tai were very impressed that, although Ven. Wei-Chueh had nearly 2,000 monastic disciples, he seemed to know each individual well. For example, when a nun disciple of his was severely ill, the monastery arranged for her to live in a separate home near the monastery where they accommodated sick nuns. She recalled how Ven. Wei-Chueh would visit them regularly. Even in his old age, he remembered the ailments of each one of them, and whenever he greeted them he would ask about their specific health conditions.²⁵³

However, some stories narrate how Ven. Wei-Chueh could be rigorous and strict with

²⁵² Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2004, 50).

²⁵³ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2018a, 109).

his disciples. For example, he once asked a monk disciple to plant an expensive tree that had been donated by a lay devotee. After the tree had been planted, the master told the disciple to move the tree to the right. After that initial adjustment, the master told him again to move the tree to the left. This continued a few more times: a test of whether the monk could stay calm and undisturbed despite the absurdity of his instructions.²⁵⁴ Another monk disciple was afraid of singing and nervous about leading the chanting during a ceremony. In the middle of that ceremony, Ven. Wei-Chueh suddenly walked up to the monk and told him to change the ceremonial procedure.²⁵⁵ Although it is a social norm to pursue ‘success’ in Buddhist monasteries as elsewhere, it seems that Chan masters are not generally afraid of failures or negative experiences, and sometimes intentionally create such challenges for their students as part of a method for enhancing their mental strength and overcoming their limitations through facing up to their weaknesses.

Ven. Foyuan was also well-known for giving unexpected blows to monastic students with his wooden stick, his fist, or at times his feet, as part of his Chan teaching.²⁵⁶ A monk in his thirties told me that every time he saw Ven. Foyuan, or even heard his voice from a distance, he did not dare to have any bad thoughts. Indeed, many young monk disciples in Yunmen used to run away when they saw Ven. Foyuan coming, despite admiring and respecting him deeply. The same informant added that ‘Chan masters not only teach their disciples what mindfulness is, but more importantly, have an ability to help their disciples retain their mindfulness.’²⁵⁷ A monk in Chung Tai echoed this view, noting that when he was a lay follower, he always looked forward to meeting Ven. Wei-Chueh, and was eager for opportunities to talk with him. However, after he became a monk and was given a highly responsible role, he hoped that he would *not* be seen by this monk-teacher for fear that he would be given harsh criticism or more difficult

²⁵⁴ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2004, 61).

²⁵⁵ I heard this story in Chung Tai’s Kaohsiung branch as a lay follower.

²⁵⁶ Zhang (2016, 424-49).

²⁵⁷ Fieldnote recorded on April 5, 2019.

tasks. This anecdote seems to reflect that the teacher-student bond undergoes a fundamental change after the student renounces secular life, a change underpinned by a deepening of the master's responsibility for the disciple's spiritual progress. Lu likens the level of relationship between master and disciple to that of a parent and a child in a Chinese family: the former is in a position of authority to instruct the latter, who should receive such instruction with respect and obedience.²⁵⁸

Thirty-three of the stories in *Foyuan Miaoxin Chanshi Chanyao* illustrate how Ven. Foyuan used such methods across a variety of situations, to correct his students' mistakes, test their levels of spiritual cultivation, and stop their thoughts from dwelling in unwholesomeness.²⁵⁹ Ven. Yingang, one of his monk disciples, described his own experience of interacting with the master in the following terms:

It is difficult for ordinary people to understand the grand master's pedagogical method that helps us open up our wisdom: 30 sticks for answering [his question] and equally 30 sticks for not answering. What is going on? In his method, slowly you start to lose the concept of right and wrong. When the feeling of being on the verge of extinction appears, you then suddenly find another way out. This is how the grand master blows away all your delusions. At the intersection of the past and future, you find the answer[.]²⁶⁰

This teaching style is also evident in the narratives of past enlightened Chan masters, which – importantly – reveal an assumption that only enlightened masters would use such aggressive methods; and then, only when absolutely necessary, with a deep sense of compassion. *Banghe*, in other words, is not perceived as a tool for punishment in the tradition, but rather as a symbolic act that expresses an idea, serves as an immediate response to an interlocutor's question, or is used as an alternative pedagogical tool to directly confront and intervene in the student's problem. The same effects cannot be achieved through ordinary teaching. As McRae notes, 'the goal of the interactions is the enlightenment of the students.'²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Neimann and Stelson (2020, 125).

²⁵⁹ Zhong and Zhang (2007, 428).

²⁶⁰ Yunmen Monastery (2012b, 41).

²⁶¹ McRae (2000a, 47).

That is, the main purpose of applying such tailor-made teaching methods is cut off the disciple's unceasing stream of delusion and evoke recognition of his/her true nature.

Yun has criticised as narrow the commonplace viewpoint in modern Buddhist studies that the master-disciple relationship in the Zen tradition is merely a by-product 'of hierarchies in the social power structure'. Instead, he argues that the relationship is a positive one, which works 'effectively as primary momentum and vector in the actual scenes of Zen practice.'²⁶² My findings resonate with his view. The hierarchy in the Buddhist tradition functions through those individuals with more advanced knowledge and skills taking on the role of transmitting them to the less-experienced younger generation of practitioners. Those disciples who have achieved spiritual realisation then go on to become the next generation of authority figures in the collective Buddhist heritage.

The master-disciple interaction as revealed in my two focal monasteries presents a new understanding of the mode of transmission in Chan tradition. McRae sounded a warning about understanding Chan Buddhism from the ancient literature as 'a straight-line succession' between each Chan master and the next in his lineage: deeming this a 'myth' that radically oversimplified 'fantastically complicated sets of cultural and religious phenomena'.²⁶³ My study has confirmed that, in the careers of three Chan masters, there was indeed more than a mere one-to-one dharma succession or training. Rather, it was more like a one-to-many educational approach, that spread each master's influence and presence throughout his community. Even after the master's passing, his spiritual legacy was crystallised in the collective memory of the monastery he had led, and thus formed a principle or basis for future spiritual cultivation.

My findings suggest that, despite the prevalence of an attitude that one should not rely

²⁶² Yun (2009, 212).

²⁶³ McRae (2003).

on people (emotionally or otherwise), but only on the dharma, master-disciple relationships form the essential foundation of the two focal monastic communities. It is as if Chan masters act as magnets, attracting large numbers of people into the Buddhist tradition. Their charisma shapes the ethos of monasteries, notably including what kinds of tradition they choose to uphold. Very often, monastics and lay practitioners alike come to particular monasteries not only due to dharma considerations, but to seek direct teaching from living Chan masters and/or hagiographical images of deceased ones. Arguably, without these important masters, these followers would not have gathered together. And, regardless of the factuality of how Chan masters are depicted in hagiographic texts and oral traditions, the cases of two contemporary monasteries attest to such figures' pivotal roles as embodiments of the teaching of mindfulness and models of enlightened beings.

Chapter 3 The formation of a moral community and monastic identity construction

In the previous chapter, we looked at three Chan masters as a point of departure for understanding this dissertation's two focal monastic communities, and how these masters' images and histories have been utilised to exemplify *zhengnian* within the Buddhist communities. A Chan monastery is often called *conglin* (forest), an analogy indicating that the place has rules and laws of its own and grows together in harmony. *Chanlin Baoxun* explicitly points out that 'morality is the root of the *conglin* and monastics are the root of morality.'²⁶⁴ It also highlights that a Chan monastery is a moral community made up of monastics who seek spiritual enlightenment and a path to liberation, and who are bound to each other through common ethical commitments. Poceski suggests that 'monastic identity and practice are intimately related to the observance of the *vinaya* (*lǚ*), the monastic code of discipline.'²⁶⁵ Rasmussen describes the church as a moral community as it 'helps form moral character and shapes moral judgments and actions'.²⁶⁶ This applies equally well to the role of a Chan monastery, which guides and dominates its members by moral rules. It is thus worth asking how an individual, at the level of his/her own mentality or consciousness, becomes a part of the collectivity of a Chan monastic community. Accordingly, this chapter explores the role of *zhengnian* in both the formation of a moral community and the construction of its members' identities.

Anyone who wishes to become a monastic must undergo a process of transition and learning. Often, however, part of the necessary knowledge — of the monastery's environment, lifestyle, and other residents — has already been acquired, insofar as the candidate is already

²⁶⁴ *Chanlin Baoxun* (*Treasured Instructions of Chan Monastery*, 1038b, 23-28) is also known as *Chanmen Baoxun* or *Chanmen Baoxun Ji*. The four-volume series is a collection of 291 pieces of quotations from 42 Chan masters and a popular introductory book series for novices to study the standards of behaviours and conducts in Chan Buddhism. For an overview of *Chanlin Baoxun*, see Lin (2006).

²⁶⁵ Poceski (2006, 27).

²⁶⁶ Rasmussen (1995, 182).

a lay devotee there, and has begun imagining him- or herself as a monk or nun.²⁶⁷ Whether in Mainland China or Taiwan, becoming a fully ordained monastic is seen as proceeding in multiple stages: two for a man – *chujia* (renunciation) and *juzujie* (full ordination) – and three for a woman: *chujia*, two years' probation, and *juzujie*.²⁶⁸ Though they are equally important, indeed paramount, as milestones in any monastic's career, renunciation and full ordination hold different kinds of meaning, and involve different kinds of relationship negotiation. That is, the former signifies a turning point: a withdrawal from the secular responsibilities, family roles, and emotional ties. This can be quite difficult and emotionally painful, since the success or failure of any new journey one embarks upon often depends on the understanding and support of one's secular family. Full ordination, in contrast, requires far more complex technical procedures as well as a network of support involving the whole *saṃgha* (see 3.1 for further details) but far less negotiation of one's relations in and with the secular world.

Heirman has highlighted that fully ordained monks and nuns are 'at the apex of Buddhist monasticism.'²⁶⁹ In Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, the 'fullness' of full ordination is grounded in three distinct kinds of ordination, which correspond to the monastic's duty to observe three kinds of precepts.²⁷⁰ This Chinese triple-platform ordination, *santan dajie*, incorporates novice ordination, *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇīs* ordination, and Bodhisattva ordination, in that sequence;²⁷¹ and it can be seen as legitimising one's entry into a monastic community as much

²⁶⁷ For instance, a lay practitioner would learn about the monastic etiquette of dining while participating in dining ritual in monasteries or witness or even experience the monastic life by upholding eight precepts (*aṣṭāṅga-śīla*) for one day and one night in the monastery.

²⁶⁸ Heirman (2002, 65-79). The two years' probation refers to a status between novices and fully-ordained nuns that is only applicable to women. The Dharmaguptakavinaya indicates that a *śikṣamāṇā* must follow the ten precepts of a *śrāmaṇera* and the six rules of a *śikṣamāṇā*. For details, see Heirman (2008b).

²⁶⁹ Heirman (2018, 159).

²⁷⁰ The triple ordination involves taking the ten precepts of novices, 250 precepts of *bhikṣus*, and 348 precepts of *bhikṣuṇīs* prescribed in the *Sifen Lü* (Dharmaguptakavinaya) and the 10 major and 48 minor Bodhisattva precepts in the *Fanwang Jing* (*Brahma's Net Sutra* T24n1484), which is traditionally regarded as having been recorded in Sanskrit and then translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva (344-413) in 406. The Dharmaguptakavinaya (T22n1428) has been the main reference point for monastic discipline in China since the Tang dynasty. For a detailed discussion on the Dharmaguptakavinaya, see Heirman (2002). For a general overview of the development of *vinaya* tradition in China, see Heirman (2008a) and Wen (1999, 131-44).

²⁷¹ According to Campo (2017, 133), the procedure of *santan dajie* was 'established in the early seventeenth century by Guxin Ruxin (1541-1615) and later promulgated by his disciple Hanyue Fazang (1573-1635)'.

as preparation to become a formal monastic member.

As well as shedding new light on the actual performance and training details of *santan dajie*, this chapter will discuss how *zhengnian* is involved in the process of transforming a practitioner and transferring him or her across the threshold into the monastic community. My focus here is not on *vinaya* textual studies or debates over the legality of the ordination procedure,²⁷² but rather the relation between mindfulness and ritual performance. Specifically, I will examine how the concept of mindfulness is structured into a series of particular ritual practices for establishing monastic identity; how it helps to form ethical boundaries between the ordinand and both the laity and probationary monastics; and how it is seen as energising and supporting moral consciousness via a web of interpersonal interactions.

First, it is probably worth asking why anyone would feel motivated to observe so many new rules. The Brahma's Net Sutra offers us some clues: 'When a sentient being takes the Buddha's precepts, he or she is immediately admitted to the throne of all Buddhas. One attains the realm of perfect enlightenment and becomes a truly enlightened sentient being.'²⁷³ In this sense, the triple-platform ordination rite is not merely a procedure conferring formal membership of a monastic community. Rather, symbolically, it represents entry into a saintly world. The spiritual symbolism of the three types of precepts in *santan dajie* implies a threefold karmic relationship between observing such precepts and spiritual attainment. In theory, in other words, each type of precept gives rise to a certain fruit of sainthood. In *Shami Luyi Yaolue*, novice precepts are described as a ladder to *bhikṣu* (*bhikṣuṇīs*) precepts, and as a foundation to Bodhisattva precept.²⁷⁴ Similarly, the *Sutra of Forty-two Chapters* highlights that

Scholars have noticed an ongoing effort towards restoring a 'correct' ordination procedure as a way to revitalise Chinese monastic discipline, seen as a part of Buddhist revival in Mainland China after the Mao era (Bianchi 2017, 2019).

²⁷² See, among others, Heirman (2011).

²⁷³ T24n1484.p1004a19-21.

²⁷⁴ J32nB277.p589a12-13. *Shami Luyi Yaolue* (*A Brief Introduction of Novice Precepts and Deportment*) is composed by Ven. Zhuhong (1535-1615). It is a popular and main introductory book for expounding the moral codes of the ten precepts and deportment trainings for novices in Chinese Buddhism.

bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇīs precepts are the cause of people's attainment of arhathood;²⁷⁵ and Bodhisattva precepts are seen to lead to the perfection of Buddhahood.²⁷⁶

Li has pointed out that in Chinese Mahāyāna monasticism, the upholding of Bodhisattva precepts – a feature absent from both Theravāda and Tibetan *vinaya* traditions – shows that the Bodhisattva ideal is integrated into the fundamental character of Chinese monastic identity.²⁷⁷ In Chinese Buddhism, the holy states of enlightened beings include *shengwen* (hearer), *yuanjue* (Pratyekabuddha), *pusa* (Bodhisattva), and *fo* (Buddha). At the very least, sanctification involves breaking away from *liu-genben-fannao* (six basic afflictions),²⁷⁸ as well as the extinction of one's own desire, especially one's sexuality. Taking and observing precepts marks the beginning of a transgression of the boundaries between the mundane and sacred worlds and manifests one's determination to achieve spiritual awakening.

Santan dajie is also seen as 'the coming-of-age rite' (*chengnianli*) for Chinese Buddhist monastics. Van Gennep's concept of rites of passage has been widely applied to discussions of transitions in individuals' statuses via rituals and ceremonies.²⁷⁹ His threefold framework, comprising separation, transition, and incorporation, can usefully illuminate *santan dajie*'s functions, meanings, and structure. Its first stage – *separation* – corresponds to the ordinand leaving his/her own monastic community and entering the temporary confinement of the ordination venue. Once he/she is separated from others, the *transition* occurs at the ordination ceremony when the ordinand's body and mind undergo various forms of ritual training that re-structure and purify them. Lastly, *incorporation* takes place upon the individual's return to his/her original monastic community, now in receipt of a new religious identity.

²⁷⁵ X37n670.p667c10-11. According to tradition, *The Sutra of Forty-Two Chapters* (*Sishierzhang Jing*) is often regarded as the first Indian Buddhist sutra translated into Chinese and was translated by Indian monks Jia Shemoteng (?-73) and Zhu Falan (?-?) in 67 CE.

²⁷⁶ T24n1484.p1004a28-b6.

²⁷⁷ Li (2000, 171).

²⁷⁸ The six root afflictions (*ṣaḍmūlakleśa*) are desire, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and mistaken views. See Buswell and Lopez (2013, 733).

²⁷⁹ Gennep et al. (2004).

Chuanjie Zhengfan contains an explanation of why the ordination process is performed in a progressive manner from novice ordination to Bodhisattva ordination,²⁸⁰ using the metaphor of pearl-fishing:

[T]hose who would like to pick pearls in the sea must start from the shallow water and move into the deeper level. [Similarly ...] those who would like to receive precepts must start from the basic level and move onto a more advanced level. Trespassing the rule offers no benefits to receive the *vinaya*. Thus, one's mind echoes the *vinaya*. There has never been a case concerning the success of full ordination precepts without taking the novice precepts.²⁸¹

Clearly, the above statement is not concerned merely with a legal procedure relating to one's external identity. Instead, it reminds us that both the transformation of the inner self, and the coming together of this inner self with one's outer identity, both occur slowly and gradually; and thus, that a progressive approach must be taken to the regulation and refinement of one's body, speech, and mind that the precepts make possible.

Seen in the context of an entire monastic career, the ceremony may appear relatively short, which approximately takes 30 up to 50 days. Nevertheless, it is widely agreed to be not only the most sacred ritual a monk or nun will undergo, but also the most rigorous and unforgettable experience of his or her life.²⁸² The traditional lore about the rigour of the ordination procedure includes the well-known maxim, 'Kneel the novice, beat the *bhikṣu*, burn the Bodhisattva's head.'²⁸³ This phrase accurately denotes that the ritual procedure, designed to hone one's religious resolve, is physically and mentally challenging, and includes prolonged kneeling, rigorous corrections, physical punishments, and even ascetic acts such as burning

²⁸⁰ *Chuanjie Zhengfan* (X60n1128) is written by *Vinaya* Master Ven. Duti Jianyue (1601-1679). According to Ven. Sheng-Yen (1997:147), there are at least seven types of formula books for equipping the ordination ceremony in Chinese Buddhism, *Chuanjie Zhengfan* being the most popular one. For a general overview of Ven. Jianyue, see Ven. Guo-Deng (2003).

²⁸¹ X60n1128.p637b24-c2.

²⁸² For example, as per Ven. Hsing-Yun's personal recollection of the ordination ceremony, 'During the 53 days of the ordination ceremony, we were not allowed to speak or look around, rather we had to bring our eyes inwards and reflect upon our minds. While listening to the sermon, we used to kneel on the gravel floor for three to five hours, our skin bruised and bled from the pebbles. Those 53 days felt like 53 years. Yet it was the most memorable time of my youth'. See Ven. Hsing-Yun (accessed February 15, 2020).

²⁸³ Ven. Sheng-Yen (2015, 101).

scalp.

The triple-platform ordination ceremony creates a very distinctive sacred space and atmosphere. Unlike many other Buddhist rituals, it is conducted in complete isolation from the outside world, to preserve the purity of the space. Laypeople, and even monastics who are irrelevant to the ceremony, are strictly prohibited from entering the area. One day prior to the commencement of the ceremony, the whole body of fully ordained monks and nuns at the host monastery attends a ritual called *jiejie*, which establishes the boundary for the official ritual for its entire duration.²⁸⁴ The map of this boundary is shown on a screen, and everyone living or working at the site is informed about it. The *jiezi* (ordinands) themselves are not allowed to transgress this boundary, their areas of activity being limited to the *jiechang* (ordination venue), a confined space protected from potential risks of violating the Buddhist precepts, in which they are expected to dedicate the entirety of their time and energy to learning how to behave like ideal monastics.

During the ritual period, the ordinands will receive an array of different types of support from the host monastery, including medical care, meals, and bedding, and in some cases, robes donated by the laity. They will listen to the teaching of venerable preceptors and be supervised by senior monastic mentors, with the aim of conforming their bodies and minds to the words and actions of an approaching consciousness. Heirman has described the full ordination rite as ‘a well-organized, highly formalized ceremony [...] to prevent a newcomer from damaging this community.’²⁸⁵ In short, formal monastic identity-construction is grounded in the interrelationship of preceptors, mentors, and ordinands, but also involves external support from one’s monastic peers and lay devotees, and is underpinned by a strong communal sense of the need to protect monastic traditions and ensure their continuity. Based on the idea that ‘the

²⁸⁴ For an overview of *jiejie* ritual in the Chinese ordination ceremony, see Ven. Qian-Ding (2010).

²⁸⁵ Heirman (2002, 79).

vinaya is the lifeblood of Buddhism. If *vinaya* exists, Buddhism exists' in *Shanjian Lü Piposha*,²⁸⁶ holding an ordination ceremony goes beyond the scope of an individual religious state and has a direct social meaning of ensuring the sustainability of Buddhist lineages in the collective sense.

The majority of the data on which the remainder of this chapter is derived from my fieldwork on the triple-platform ordination ritual at Yunmen Monastery in 2019,²⁸⁷ and from my personal experience of being an ordinand at Chung Tai Chan Monastery in 2005 and a mentor there three years later. However, the chapter also draws on documentary data, including the official guidebook *Chuanjie Zhengfan*, and *Tongjielu* (Ordination Yearbook).²⁸⁸

Date	Location	Ordinands	Regions
8 April-9 May 2005	Chung Tai Chan Monastery, Nantou County, Taiwan	88 monks 288 nuns	Taiwan (majority), Germany, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia, Singapore, and Italy ²⁸⁹
28 September-28 October 2008	Chung Tai Chan Monastery, Nantou County, Taiwan	78 monks 235 nuns	Taiwan (majority), Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Myanmar
11 April-10 May 2019	Yunmen Monastery, Guangdong, Mainland China	320 monks 536 nuns ²⁹⁰	Ordinands were all required to be Chinese citizens (exclusive of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan)

Table 1. Details of the three case full-ordination ceremonies

²⁸⁶ T24n1462.p0674c22-5a01.

²⁸⁷ Being a nun, I was not allowed to enter the venue of monk ordination and, therefore, instead spent the time observing the whole procedure of nun ordination, which took place in Yunmen's affiliated nunnery, Xiaoxitian.

²⁸⁸ It is a commemorative volume documenting the ceremony by the host monastery. The content of *tongjielu* usually contains a brief biography and a photo of every preceptor, witness, mentor, and ordinand who participated in the ceremony. Chung Tai *tongjielu* also records the detail of everyday schedule and the content of dharma talks given by each preceptor.

²⁸⁹ In Chung Tai's ordination ceremonies, Chung Tai monks and nuns contribute to more than half the strength, while the rest of the ordinands come from different monasteries and even abroad.

²⁹⁰ Initially, there were over 700 nun ordinands attending the ceremony, but only 536 nuns actually completed the whole ritual procedures, as shown in the Ordination Yearbook. Others were either too sick to complete, voluntarily dropped out, or failed to meet the requirements.

3.1 Supportive web of interaction

3.1.1 The host monastery

It is noteworthy that, even though Chung Tai and Yunmen are Chan monasteries, not *vinaya*-centred ones,²⁹¹ they have long held triple-platform ordination ceremonies on a regular basis. This reflects *vinaya* rules' status as a foundation shared by Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole.²⁹² The fundamental congruence between Chan practices and *vinaya* was alluded to in Ven. Wei-Chueh's statement that 'meditation is priority and precepts should be the first'.²⁹³ Similarly, Ven. Xuyun said that if one observes the precepts 'as purely as frost', one can expect to achieve Buddhahood.²⁹⁴

Yunmen – full name, Yunmen Dajue Chan Monastery – is located in the north of Guangdong Province in a mountainous region of the autonomous county of Ruyuan Yao, where the minority Yao people live.²⁹⁵ The monastery has an ancient palace style of architecture with green roofs and yellow walls. It sits near the top of one of the foothills of Yunmen Mountain (Yun Men Shan) and for that reason it is also known locally as Yunmen Si. Yunmen restored the tradition of *santan dajie* under the leadership of Ven. Xuyun in 1951, when he had nearly completed the temple restoration;²⁹⁶ and the monastery held this ceremony approximately ten

²⁹¹ According to *Chongzhi Pini Shiyi Jiyao* (X40n719.p343c8-9), compiled by Pure Land Master Ven. Zhixu (1599-1655), since the Tang and Song dynasties, Buddhist temples in Chinese Buddhism are divided into three categories according to their different practices: Chan, lecture, and *vinaya* temples.

²⁹² According to Ven. Wei-Chueh, all Buddhist schools, whether Chan, Pure Land, exoteric, or esoteric, are based on *vinaya*. See Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed April 8, 2020). We can see that many modern Chinese masters across different Buddhist schools advocated the necessity of *vinaya* standard, such as the modernist advocator Ven. Taixu (1890-1947), Chan Master Ven. Xuyun (1840?-1959), *Vinaya* Master Ven. Hongyi (1880-1942), and Pure Land Master Ven. Cizhou (1877-1958).

²⁹³ His statement relates to the idea that while 'pursuing the Way and engaging with Chan practices, the precepts should go first' as mentioned in *Chanyuan Qinggui* (X63n1245.p523a19), which is compiled by the Chinese monk Ven. Zongze in 1103 as the earliest work of the Chinese code of 'pure rules'. For a comprehensive introduction of *Chanyuan Qinggui*, see Ven. Yifa (2002).

²⁹⁴ Cen (accessed July 20, 2020).

²⁹⁵ The area is well-known worldwide for its dramatic landscape and reddish sandstone. The UNESCO World Heritage Site Mount Danxia is nearby, with its spectacular cliffs and many unusual rock formations, known as Danxia landform.

²⁹⁶ Ven. Jinghui (2016a, 188).

times between 1986 and 2019.²⁹⁷ The venue for monk ordination is usually Yunmen *per se*, while nun ordination takes place in one of its affiliated nunneries, such as Xiaoxitian (Small Western Paradise) which is just a short stroll away.²⁹⁸

Chung Tai Chan Monastery, on the other hand, is a grand 37-storey structure, red with a golden dome, nestled deep in the mountains in the heart of Taiwan. Ven. Wei-Chueh hosted full-ordination ceremonies there in 1997, 2001, 2005, 2008, and 2011,²⁹⁹ and invited Ven. Yicheng (1927-2017), the abbot of Zhenru Chan Monastery in Jiangxi, to be a preceptor in 2001, symbolically revealing some degree of continuity in *vinaya* transmission across the Taiwan Strait.³⁰⁰

In practice, not all Buddhist monasteries are capable of holding such grand events. The duties associated with doing so include inviting venerable elders as preceptors and witnesses; recruiting groups of mentors; accommodating hundreds of people coming from different monasteries, regions, and even countries, and ensuring that they live together harmoniously for several weeks; and completing the ritual itself, and its associated training tasks, efficiently. All of this represents a huge challenge to any host monastery. Hsieh has pointed out that, as compared to earlier triple-platform ordinations in Mainland China, triple-platform ordination in Taiwan is quite ‘humane’, or indeed even generous to ordinands: including offerings of robes, begging bowls, and daily necessities as gifts.³⁰¹ Nor is there any application fee.³⁰² In Yunmen’s case, the application fee in 2019 was RMB2,000 (then about £225), though each ordinand also

²⁹⁷ Yunmen Monastery (accessed November 30, 2018).

²⁹⁸ Xiaoxitian was founded in 1986 and built in a layout similar to that of Yunmen Monastery, but in a much smaller size. It has about 60 to 80 nuns.

²⁹⁹ The 1997 ceremony took place at Shifang Dajue Chan Monastery in Keelung when Ven. Wei-Chueh was invited to be the abbot there while Chung Tai was under construction. The first full ordination ceremony in Chung Tai was held between 11th September and 13th October in 2001 and had 368 ordinands after the inauguration of Chung Tai Chan monastery. See Yu (accessed September 1, 2020).

³⁰⁰ In 1994, Zhenru Chan Monastery held the first triple-platform ordination in Mainland China, which was seen as an exemplary case under the supervision of the BAC (Wen 2010:4). Ven. Yicheng was the president of BAC (2002-2010).

³⁰¹ Hsieh (2004).

³⁰² In the case of Chung Tai, each ordinand receives free gifts, robes, and cash. See Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed May 15, 2020).

received robes and a begging bowl at no additional charge.³⁰³

3.1.2 *Sanshi qizheng*: The three main preceptors and seven witnesses

According to *Chuanjie Zhengfan*, to be valid, the process of triple-platform ordination needs *sanshi* (three main preceptors),³⁰⁴ *qizheng* (seven monastic witnesses), and a group of *yinli shifu* (mentors). The preceptors and witnesses are usually abbots and abbesses of various monasteries with decades of monastic experience. They not only serve as models of moral commitment and religious devotion but can also be seen as a bridge linking Buddhist heritage and tradition to the ordinands' future responsibilities. Moreover, without the participation of these senior members, it is deemed impossible for an ordinand to gain a new religious status. In other words, an individual's religious identity and path towards enlightenment are built on both collective commitment and lineage transmission. Each ordinand is expected to follow the previous generation's spiritual experience, as concretised in their teachings and behaviours, and then pass them on to the monastic generations of the future.

As the *Brahma's Net Sutra* emphasises, direct *vinaya* transmission from a master to a disciple should be marked by sincerity and authenticity.³⁰⁵ This highlights that the identity, and perhaps even the commitment of the preceptors conveying the *vinaya* affect the ritual's outcome, and that human connections therefore play an essential role in the construction of monastic identity and inner transformation. The interaction that takes place between preceptors and ordinands, in contrast, is more emblematic: i.e., an interaction between members of the older and younger generations of the monastic community, who may not know each other prior to the ceremony, and who may never see each other again. In the ceremony I attended at Chung Tai, many of the senior attendees were not in good health, and the three main preceptors – all

³⁰³ Yunmen Monastery (accessed November 30, 2018).

³⁰⁴ They are *dejie heshang* (a principal master), *jiemo heshang* (a master of the ritual), and *jiaoshou heshang* (an instructor).

³⁰⁵ T24n1484.p1006c10-13.

of whom were more than 80 years of age – moved about slowly with the aid of walking sticks. It was evident that the required long hours of sitting, and the intensive *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇīs* rituals themselves, were physically challenging for them. However, they endured these physical discomforts for the greater good, i.e., the spiritual continuity that held their tradition together.

3.1.3 Yinli shifu: Mentors

The *yinli shifu*, who are referred to by that term whether they are male or female, mainly to assist the ordinands in conducting themselves properly within each ritual, and more generally, seek to guide each ceremonial procedure to a successful conclusion.³⁰⁶ A mentor must be fully ordained, and must usually also meet a certain standard of monastic training and experience. In the case of Chung Tai, they usually held a three-week training session for mentors to familiarise themselves with the liturgy and chanting, re-train themselves with the highest standard of Buddhist deportment, and understand the complexity of the ceremony schedule and their duties. In this dissertation's two focal monasteries, most of the individuals selected as mentors were either lecturers at Buddhist seminaries or monastic administrators whose specific duties involved the management of other monastery residents. At both sites, each mentor was allocated a unit consisting of twelve ordinands, known as a *ban*, a term roughly translatable as 'squad'. Mentors could be easily distinguished from ordinands by their appearance, with the former holding a wooden rule called a *jiechi* in front of their chests, and also wearing differently coloured robes. During ceremonies, mentors seldom spoke to communicate with their mentees, but instead used the *jiechi* to correct their physical postures or to point out the correct direction to march in.³⁰⁷

The harmony and purity of these rituals depends not only upon every ordinand, but also

³⁰⁶ Their roles in guiding and leading the ordinands to perform correctly in the ordination ceremony are not described in detail in *Chuanjie Zhengfan*.

³⁰⁷ See Appendix One: Photo 2.

on each mentor, who is required to maintain calm and attentive to the subtle problems of each ordinand and give him or her timely guidance. For example, during short breaks in the ceremonies I observed at Chung Tai, a mentor usually stood outside the toilet and ensured that the ordinands robes were taken off and folded neatly before they entered the toilet. Indirectly, mentors shaped an atmosphere of solemnness and the ordinands seemed to pay much closer attention to every detail of what they were doing.

The interactions between *yinli shifu* and *jiezi* are intimate, and they spend most of their time together during the ordination. Thus, the former had to be very mindful in interacting with their ordinands, as any spontaneous show of their emotions or revelation of their thoughts could have had profound effects on them. It is, however, appropriate for a mentor to serve as a mirror in which the ordinand can see his/her own inappropriate or incorrect acts more clearly. In 2008, I acted as a mentor to 24 ordinands, some of whom were old friends of mine. However, I had to put aside any personal emotion, and supervise each ordinand with the same level of rigour. During the triple-platform ordination ceremony, the ordinands were obliged to accept any corrections or guidance from the mentors, including criticism and seemingly harsh commands. If anyone failed to comply with the rules or disobeyed the mentors, he/she could be disqualified – as indeed happened in 2005 in the middle of the ceremony, with some ordinands being asked to leave, and others simply giving up.³⁰⁸

3.1.4 *Jiezi*: Ordinands

In theory, Mahāyāna Buddhism accords everyone equal potential to reach enlightenment, but it nevertheless places limitations on those who wish to join the monastic community. Each ordinand must be at least 20 years old and have no debt, criminal record, or

³⁰⁸ This is based on my observation as an ordinand in 2005. In most of the cases, the ordinands could not endure such rigorous trainings and chose to leave or were unwilling to follow rules, and, therefore, were asked to withdraw.

household responsibilities.³⁰⁹ Each monastery hosting a full-ordination ceremony can set selection criteria for ordinands, in addition to the basic ones set forth above. In the case of Chung Tai, there is no explicit regulation regarding whether a female ordinand should be *śikṣamāṇā* (a probationer) for two years, as regulated in the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*.³¹⁰ In the case of Yunmen Monastery, ordinands are required to be under age sixty, and to have undergone at least one year of monastic training if male, or two years, if female. They are also expected to be able to memorise the content of daily monastic chanting, including the *Zhaomu Kesong* (*Morning and Evening Chanting Services*) and *Pini Riyong* (the *Daily Vinaya*). My findings at Yunmen resonate with that of Bianchi's study of the general requirements of the ordination announcements in Mainland China.³¹¹ In Mainland China, decisions to hold triple-platform ordination ceremonies must be approved by the BAC, which decides the number of people that should be fully ordained in each host monastery and issues ordination certificates.³¹² In 2019, Yunmen had obtained permission to issue 350 certificates each for monks and nuns, but faced a dilemma due to much higher registration numbers. Following lengthy negotiation with the BAC and local authorities, they were allowed to accept more ordinands than the quota, but despite such permission, some of those ordained did not receive proper certification.³¹³ The ceremony there that year was strongly marked by a collective sense of anxiety around this issue, as even after their arrival, in the midst of memorising the required ritual content, many

³⁰⁹ According to *Sifen Lǚ* (Dharmaguptakavinaya X60n1128.p666b10-11), a person who has reached the age of 20 years can endure cold and heat, wind and rain, and hunger and thirst; keep the precepts; eat only one meal a day at noon; and tolerate evil speech and poisonous insects.

³¹⁰ T22n1428.p924a16-c9. In fact, most Chung Tai monks and nuns are trained as a novice for two years before receiving full ordination, but exceptions also exist.

³¹¹ Bianchi (2019, 158).

³¹² In May 1996, the BAC formulated the Administrative Rules for the Transmission of the Three Great Precepts in Chinese Buddhist Monasteries, which clearly stipulates the number of preceptors, requirement for preceptors, qualifications of preceptors, conditions of the preceptor monasteries, arrangements for the duration of precepts, and procedures for the transmission of the three great precepts, to ensure that the ceremony can be carried out in accordance with the law and rules. See Wen (2010, 4).

³¹³ According to my fieldwork, *jiedie* (a formal certificate) has three stamps granted by the BAC on the national level, the Guangdong Buddhist Association on the provincial level, and the host monastery on the local level. Some ordinands did not have all the three stamps.

ordinands were unsure if they would be given a chance to engage in those rituals or not. They also had to deal with the hardships of overcrowded accommodation and inadequate numbers of toilets and bathrooms.

However, I was told that not all venues for the triple-platform ordination were full, especially in some less well-known monasteries. Some host monasteries, meanwhile, held the rite only for monks. For example, Shaolin Monastery held the triple-platform ordination only for monks in 2019, and the quota was 400 monks.³¹⁴ Monastic ordinands often travel long distances to become fully ordained, and I have met some who travelled more than 3,000 kilometres from the far northeast of China to attend the ordination ceremony at Yunmen, citing its prestige, which they felt would benefit their practice for their whole monastic career.

In Taiwan, prior to the lifting of martial law in 1987, the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) was the highest Buddhist authority in Taiwan and had to grant permission to hold triple-platform ordination ceremonies. According to Li, '[t]he lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987 ended the BAROC's dominance over the national ordination system'.³¹⁵ Since then, monasteries have been allowed to decide this for themselves. Some of the ordinands who came to Chung Tai also travelled long distances. A young Malaysian nun who attended the 2010 ceremony told me that her monk teacher had insisted on sending her to be ordained at Chung Tai, due to its high reputation.

3.1.5 Lay donors

Although laypeople are prohibited from taking part in ordination ceremonies, as noted above, we should not underestimate the crucial roles they play in supporting them. As Kawanami has argued, 'the most important role monastic members perform is to keep the

³¹⁴ See gzj-wyzj (WeChat Public ID of The People's Republic of China State Bureau of Religious Affairs, accessed September 5, 2020).

³¹⁵ Li (2008, 190). For a comprehensive study of the BAROC, see Laliberté (2004). *Santan dajie* was first held by the BAROC in 1953 in Taiwan. See Jones (1999, 136).

wheel of generosity turning by receiving the people's goodwill.'³¹⁶ Lay devotees donate money, food, bedding, robes, and an array of other kinds of resources that are needed for running the ritual. While many ethnographic analyses tend to focus on rituals' central actors, Ben-Ari reminds us to take their audiences into account.³¹⁷ As such, it should be borne in mind that lay donors offer an important supportive base for the ordinands and their cultivation of mind.

In the specific case of Chung Tai, the only time these lay supporters can see the ordinands and experience some part of the sacred ritual is during the *shangtang shuofa*, when the preceptors give dharma talks to anyone who comes to make an offering. After listening to a short sermon, these lay donors wait outside the dining hall before the midday dining ritual. Once the ordinands finish eating and walk out of the dining hall, thousands of waiting laypeople offer them prepared red envelopes as they pass by.³¹⁸ Although these interactions are brief and relatively impersonal, they are held to equip the ordinands with a deeper sense of responsibility towards their vocation, and render them less likely to give it up in the future. Thus, the ordination process *per se*, and ultimately the ordinands' legitimacy as clergy, can be seen as underpinned by three sets of bilateral relationships: preceptor-ordinand, mentor-ordinand, and lay donor-ordinand in the case of Chung Tai.

In contrary, the relationship between lay donor and ordinand in the case of Yunmen was not as apparent as that in Chung Tai as lay donors neither have a chance to make offering to ordinands in person nor act as a volunteer in the case of Yunmen's nun ordination. At the result, the lack of lay support seemed to pose additional challenges to the operation of the triple-platform ordination for nuns at Yunmen. The ordination in 2019 was held during the rainy season. As briefly noted above, there were not enough beds and more than a hundred nun ordinands lived in a single large room, sleeping on meditation chairs lined up next to their

³¹⁶ Kawanami (2020, 3).

³¹⁷ Ben-Ari (1991, 135).

³¹⁸ See Appendix One: Photo 3. A red envelope is customarily used in Chinese and Southeast Asian societies for lay donors to offer money to monastic members.

suitcases. It rained every day and their hand-washed clothes hardly dried. Unsurprisingly, many of them became ill. I was conducting participant observation, and developed pneumonia myself. But because neither male nor female lay volunteers were allowed to enter the nuns' ordination space, only 40 resident nuns had to take care of 700 nun ordinands during the ceremony. Nun ordinands with medical backgrounds volunteered to take care of their sick colleagues.³¹⁹ Although there were female doctors taking turns in the nunnery for a short duration and voluntarily saw sick ordinands, the number of sick ordinands was beyond their capacity. Furthermore, based on my observation, the mentors had a lot of work and were physically exhausted. Consequently, they did not have sufficient time and energy to take care of their ordinands. At one point, an important ritual was interrupted by a thunderstorm and torrential rains. With no volunteers present to support the small team of 40 resident nuns that supported each ritual event, the nun ordinands had to break their customary silence to help each other deal with this unexpected emergency.

The triple-platform ordination ceremony conducted at Chung Tai, in contrast, was supported by a much larger team comprising lay volunteers as well as monastics. Each ritual session was performed meticulously, and ordinands were expected to participate in it with full concentration and meet the highest standards of conduct. Even when 300 to 400 ordinands had to share 20 or 30 toilet facilities, they would follow the proper protocol of taking off their robes and folding them neatly before entering. As well as keeping them clean in a strictly practical sense, this act is rooted in the respect they pay to their robes symbolically, as sacred items that should not be polluted. In addition, the ordinands were expected to practise in complete silence and have minimal interactions with others. Most ordinands at Chung Tai were disciples of Ven. Wei-Chueh and knew each other before the ceremony, so this emphasis on inward focus and lack of interpersonal contact was especially difficult for them.

³¹⁹ See Appendix One: Photo 4.

3.2 Outer transformation

During the 30-day ordination process, an ordinand must move between several identities — from a novice, to *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī*, and to Bodhisattva *bhikṣu/Bodhisattva bhikṣuṇī* — and alongside these status changes, their outward appearances and belongings change accordingly. For instance, before the novitiation, the ordinands wear only *haiqing* (a long black garment), symbolising a state of disconnectedness from monastic life. After they become novices, they receive two sets of brown robes, one called *wuyi* (*antarvāsa*) and the other, *qiyi* (*uttarāsaṅga*).³²⁰ Next, at their *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇīs* ordination, they wear three robes: *wuyi*, *qiyi*, and a further robe, known as *dayi* (*saṃghāṭī*),³²¹ as well as carry a begging bowl and *ju* (*niṣīdana*, a sitting cloth). In Taiwanese ordination ceremonies, each ordinand usually receives *xizhang* (a dharma staff) after the completion of Bodhisattva ordination as a sign of taking the Bodhisattva's great vows. These symbolic possessions are not only instruments to distinguish them from their previous secular ways of existence, but also reflect the spiritual content of a monastic life. At the end of his/her full ordination, each ordinand is (or ought to be) awarded *jiedie*, a personal ordination certificate, formal and crucial proof of their monastic identity.

Although Taiwan and Mainland China share the same *vinaya* and follow the same ordination procedures based on *Chuanjie Zhengfan*, I have noticed some differences in the details. One of the most obvious of these involves their robes. On the Mainland, the *dayi* worn by a nun is brown with nine stripes, while a monk's is red and has 25 stripes. Similarly, while nun preceptors on the Mainland wear dark-brown robes, monk preceptors there wear bright-red ones. In Taiwan, on the other hand, the robes worn by preceptor monks and preceptor nuns are the same colour and similar in style. Likewise, there is no difference in the robes between

³²⁰ In *Pini Zuochi Xushi* (X41n30.p417c14-422c19) by Ven. Duti Jianyue, as a subcommentary on *Sifen Lü Shanbu Suiji Jiemo* (X41n728) by Ven. Daoxuan (596-667) in 648, there is a detailed introduction of three kinds of robes. *Wuyi* features five stripes and *qiyi* has seven stripes. Usually a fully ordained monk or nun wears *qiyi* in daily morning and evening chanting, while a novice wears *wuyi*.

³²¹ *Dayi* is usually made of nine strips of cloth. It can also be made from more strips, with the highest grade not exceeding 25.

male and female ordinands. Like their distinctive robes, the very humble manner in which the Chinese nuns present themselves seems to show the greater gender gap that exists in the social context of Mainland China as compared to Taiwan.³²²

Becoming fully ordained grants a person a higher social status in the *samgha*. When the newly ordained return to their own monasteries after ordination, they are immediately treated differently, in terms of how they are addressed, queuing (i.e., they are allowed to stand in front of those who are not fully ordained), their seating allocations, and the higher responsibility levels of the administrative roles they may perform.

3.3 Inner transformation

I observed that many ordinands seemed not only more cheerful at the end of the ordination process than at the beginning, but also more dignified and self-assured: almost as if they had grown up overnight. Razzetti has argued that rituals, in contrast to regular daily religious exercises, are ‘more meaningful and increase mindfulness’.³²³ According to an official explanation of the process published by Chung Tai in 2005, ‘through each ritual from day to night, ordinands learn to observe, collect, and transform the body and mind to abide in their mindfulness.’³²⁴ This suggests that the ritual process for triple-platform ordination in Chinese Buddhism is not only a procedure for conferring a formal religious status, but also provides the ordinand with an opportunity for mindfulness development, which transforms and restructures his or her inner world. Each element in the ritual has been designed to reinforce the ordinand’s connection and commitment to achieving the ultimate goal.

The schedule of the ordination ceremony is extremely tight, with little or no opportunity for rest, from 3.45 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. daily. As briefly noted above, most ritual activities involve

³²² Qin’s (2000, 239-40) fieldwork in Mainland China during 1990s suggests that Chinese nuns faced the challenges of gender inequality: ‘the nuns are accorded a distinctly secondary status’. For a discussion on gender issues in Chinese Buddhism, see Chiu and Heirman (2015), Li (2008), and Yang (2016, 73).

³²³ Razzetti (accessed December 20, 2019).

³²⁴ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed April 4, 2020).

standing for long hours, kneeling, bowing, many times of rehearsal for perfection of ritual performance, and studying the content of precepts with little time even for sitting.³²⁵ Below, I will discuss four ritual sessions of the full-ordination ceremony, with a focus on how each of them is intended to enhance ordinands' moral awareness and self-control.

3.3.1 *Chanmo*: The repentance ritual

Chanhuitang (the Hall of Repentance) is traditionally used to address the venue where ordination ceremonies are conducted because such ceremonies always include acts of confession and repentance. Repentance can be likened to Van Gennep's 'separation phase',³²⁶ insofar as one departs one's previous secular state by confessing past wrongdoing. Chinese Buddhists see such wrongdoing as leading to an accumulation of impurities, which constitutes an obstacle to the formation of a new monastic identity, but which the act of repentance can remove. *Chuanjie Zhengfan* metaphorically describes each ordinand as a bottle or container, which his/her new monastic identity fills like a 'pure liquid'. But, before the pouring of this 'liquid', the 'bottle' has to be cleansed.³²⁷ Elsewhere, the ordinand is likened to a piece of white cloth, which the act of being ordained dyes; and if the cloth is not clean, the dyeing will not be a success.³²⁸

Chanmo repentance rituals are held regularly within each 30-day ceremony, and involve the ordinands gathering together to chant and make painfully long and repetitive bows to the Buddha statue. Especially on the evening before *dengtan* (see section 3.3.2), all ordinands remain in the hall and make repeated prostrations until midnight for the success with taking precepts, an event called *litongxiao*. This process, which also includes slow, melancholic

³²⁵ Hsieh (2004, 30) pointed out that some view the ritual rehearsal in Taiwanese triple-platform ordination ceremonies as overly formal. To counter the critique, introducing ordinands to the hidden meaning behind each ritual is focused upon in the Chung Tai's ordination process.

³²⁶ Gennep et al. (2004, 36) described the Rite of Separation as 'a rite of "purification" or a rite "intended to break past or future spells"'.
³²⁷ X60n1128.p630c14-19.

³²⁸ X60n1128.p634c24-635a3.

chanting of the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, is meant to prompt them to face their inner selves, to admit their past wrongdoings, to boost their willingness to start new, awakened lives, and to instil them with a collective sense of regret and yearning to return to their pure state. Although repentance should not be an emotional act, and ordinands are instructed not to drown in the memories of past wrongdoing during their repentance, sounds of bitter sobbing are sometimes heard during these events.

In addition to *chanmo*, ordinands must reveal the details of their past wrongdoings orally or in written form to their senior preceptors, in a ritual procedure known as *luzui chanhui*. Based on *Chuanjie Zhengfan*, the ordinands are asked if they have committed any transgressions,³²⁹ including any of the *qi-ni* (seven deadly sins),³³⁰ *shi-e* (ten unwholesome activities),³³¹ or *si-genben* (four fundamental heavy crimes).³³² These wrongdoings are considered *jiezhang*, ‘obstacles’, and could lead to the individual losing his/her opportunity to become fully ordained. However, dishonestly hiding one’s past wrongdoing is considered even worse, especially if doing so leads one to lose the essence of full monastic status. Thus, some ordinands struggle to decide what to reveal during *luzui chanhui*.

At the ordination ceremonies held at Chung Tai monastery, monk and nun ordinands were taken to different halls, and each of them had to write down all their past wrongdoings, especially serious ones, on a piece of paper. The preceptors read these written reports and then weighed up whether the ordinand could continue with his/her ordination process. If the revealed information was of an extreme nature, the outcome could in theory be expulsion, or a requirement to engage in extra repentance rituals.³³³ However, I have not been able to quantify

³²⁹ X60n1128.p0629c22-0635b15.

³³⁰ According to *Fanwang Jing* (Brahma’s Net Sutra), the *qi-ni* refers to shedding a Buddha’s blood, killing one’s father, mother, monk, and teacher, disrupting the saṃgha, and killing an arhat (T24n1484.p1008c1-3).

³³¹ According to the Sutra of Forty-two Chapters (T17n784.p.722b6-10), the *shi-e* refers to killing, stealing, engaging in debauchery, lying (deception), using ornate speech (flattery), insulting (abusiveness), practicing treachery (slander), coveting, being angry, and having false views.

³³² According to *Chuanjie Zhengfan* (X60n1128.p0634b15), the *si-genben* refers to sexual intercourse, stealing, killing a human being, and lying about one’s spiritual attainments.

³³³ In the case of Chung Tai, the Eighty-Eight Buddhas Great Repentance ritual was held for all ordinands.

how many ordinands have been expelled from either of my focal monasteries due to their confessions of past wrongdoing.

After undergoing the rites of repentance and confessing their wrongdoing in *luzui chanhui*, ordinands are regarded as *huifu qingjing* (having ‘returned to purity’). The intensity and pain of the repentance experience are seen to effectively motivate those who undergo it to treasure their re-gained, cleansed state, and make possible further important steps forward. In particular, the *Platform Sutra* suggests that true repentance must have two parts: remorse about past mistakes, and a vow to avoid their recurrence. Therefore, the act of repentance is seen as a continuous process, which requires the development of constant self-reflexive awareness.³³⁴ Garfield has noted that ‘mindfulness is necessary in order to combat the natural tendency to mindless action driven not by compassionate motivation and insight.’³³⁵ I would therefore suggest that a key potential link between repentance and mindfulness is this need to avoid making the same mistakes again, whilst exercising restraint of one’s mind as well as one’s body, as a step towards receiving *jieti*, which marks one’s rebirth.

3.3.2 Dengtan: Ascending to the ordination platform

After spending many days rehearsing rituals and repenting, the ordinands are finally cleansed and disciplined, and ready to be ushered into the next stage. *Dengtan* is the most important and complex procedure that an ordinand has to undergo, as it is the precise moment when his/her monastic identity is formed, via receipt of *jieti* (the essence of the precepts). *Jieti* also represents a protective power against any offences against the precepts that one observes. According to Hirakawa, it is the foundation of Buddhist identity, distinguishing not only between clergy and laity but between Buddhist and non-Buddhist.³³⁶ This power of *jieti* enables

³³⁴ According to the Platform Sutra (T48n2008.p354a2-7), *chanhui* (repentance) involves repenting all kinds of wrongdoings, such as ignorance, pride, jealousy, and avoiding repeating them.

³³⁵ Garfield (2012).

³³⁶ Hirakawa (2002).

one to remember what is wrong and what is right, when to restrain one's unwholesome deeds, and when to actively practise.

In the Chan tradition specifically, Ven. Wei-Chueh has described *jieti* as 'the present mind which neither arises nor ceases';³³⁷ and Ven. Foyuan often told his disciples that *jieti* is 'one single pure thought' that exists in the present moment.³³⁸ Their views make it clear that this moral disciplinary power of the mind is not only closely linked with a symbolic monastic identity, but also directly related to the Chan school's aim of awakening to one's 'true nature'. As Sutton states, 'ritual has to remind us of what we already know in our bones.'³³⁹ From Chan perspective, the full-ordination ceremony is designed to support the release of each ordinand's inner capacity for making virtue. However, Sato explains that this moral power is not obtained simply by an individual's will. Rather, its acquisition relies on the physical act of bowing in front of preceptors, and the verbal act of making vows to obey the precepts.³⁴⁰ The manifestation of this moral strength within one's mind cannot occur in the absence of complex ritual procedure.

In both novice and Bodhisattva ordination, the ritual of *dengtan* is conducted simultaneously for the entire group.³⁴¹ *Bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇīs* ordination, in contrast, is granted to only three ordinands at a time, following the procedure in the *Chuanjie Zhengfan*.³⁴² At both Yunmen and Chung Tai, more than a hundred *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇīs* ordination sessions had to be convened within each 30-day round of ceremonial. The *bhikṣuṇīs* ordination is conducted as a dual ritual, making it more complex than its male counterpart.³⁴³ Specifically, nun

³³⁷ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed August 6, 2020).

³³⁸ Yunmen Monastery (2014b, 221).

³³⁹ Sutton 1996 (cited in Adamek 2007, 295).

³⁴⁰ See Sato (2000).

³⁴¹ In the case of Yunmen, monks and nuns only attended Bodhisattva ordination together in the same venue. Conversely, in the case of Chung Tai, monks and nuns participate in ordination rituals together in most situations.

³⁴² X60n1128.p677a9-11.

³⁴³ The procedure known as 'dual ordination' is prescribed in eight fundamental rules (*gurudharmas*). For a historic overview of nun ordination in Chinese Buddhism, see Heirman (2001, 275-304).

ordinands need to receive *benfa* from ten senior nuns, and gain a monastic identity of *benfani* (*bhikṣuṇīs-to-be*).³⁴⁴ This is followed, later the same day, by the full-ordination platform conducted by ten senior monks and ten senior nuns.³⁴⁵

Large bells are rung and drums are beaten to signal the start of the ordination ceremony. All the ordinands line up and prostrate themselves as they pass directly in front of them.³⁴⁶ The ordinands are made to wait outside the ordination hall while the preceptors and witnesses walk around the ordination platform, chanting and blessing the sacred site to prevent any malicious demonic assaults from impeding the ceremony at this important moment. Next, the preceptors and witnesses spread their own sitting cloth to form a large circle called *heheju*,³⁴⁷ and bow to one another from a sitting position. This act of forming a circle and paying mutual respect signifies that the procedure is being carried out by a harmonious *saṃgha*, as required by the *vinaya*;³⁴⁸ but it also illustrates that *vinaya* transmission, and linking the new generation to the Buddhist heritage, is a collective effort.

Traditionally, the *jietan* is built higher than floor level, and all the preceptors and witnesses are seated in higher positions than the ordinands. This sacred space is solemn and austere, and is intended to evoke awe, honesty, and sincerity on the part of each ordinand. It is widely accepted that the process of ordination needs to be performed in a particular way to ensure the validity of the *jieti*. In *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇīs* ordination ceremonies, when a group of

³⁴⁴ According to *Sifen Lǚ Shanfan Buque Xingshi Chao* (An Abridged and Explanatory Commentary on the Dharmaguptakavinaya; T40n1805.p423a4-7), *Benfa* can be seen as *upāya* (expedient means) to become a legally-qualified *bhikṣuṇī*. Before nuns formally ascend the *bhikṣuṇī* platform, this ceremony is used to strengthen their confidence and reaffirm their commitment to ordination.

³⁴⁵ Both in Chung Tai and Yunmen, the tradition is upheld. To become a *bhikṣuṇī*, a group of nun ordinands who are expected to receive the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination attend *Benfa* in a large group. Each *benfani* must complete their *bhikṣuṇī* ordination on the same day, or the qualification of *benfani* is invalidated.

³⁴⁶ See Appendix One: Photo 5.

³⁴⁷ The purpose of *heheju* is to demonstrate the harmony between all the preceptors and witnesses, as required, to perform *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* ordination ceremonies. See X60n1128.p663a1-664a23, and Appendix One: Photo 6.

³⁴⁸ X60n1128.p664a13-23. These preceptors and witnesses chant the verse ‘Observing the precepts perfectly just like a full moon, both the body and the speech are crystal clear without any defect. Only when the assembly is in harmony are they allowed to give ordination.’

three ordinands, carrying their alms bowls and holding their sitting cloth, walk onto the ordination platform, they are wearing three robes that are rarely all worn at once. The physical weight of these garments deepens the ritualistic nature of *dengtan*, and the way they interlock symbolises the close connections among the three types of precepts the wearers uphold, reflecting the unique identity of Chinese Mahāyāna monk/nun.³⁴⁹

Next, the three ordinands spread out their sitting cloth in front of them – all at the same speed – to express their highest respect, and then kneel down in front of the senior preceptors and witnesses who overlook them, before proceeding to confess any past sins.³⁵⁰ After this confession, the principal preceptor explains the meaning of *jieti* and tells the ordinands that, to receive *jieti*, which is boundless like the universe, they must make three great vows: ‘eradicate all evil, cultivate all good deeds, and liberate all sentient beings’. He then directs the ordinands to look up the platform above and give their full attention during the four-announcements procedure (*jñāptīcatūrttha-karman*), the crucial stage of being granted one’s monastic status.³⁵¹ By the time the three ordinands walk out of the hall, about fifteen minutes will have elapsed since their arrival. Their emergence is closely followed by expressions of joy by the new *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* and their mentors alike. The precise time at which they became fully ordained is recorded, and in some cases, they are asked to memorise it themselves. As well as symbolically marking each monastic’s moment of rebirth, it also has practical ramifications, e.g., determining the queuing order during monastic gatherings.

3.3.3 *Weiyi*: Deportment training

Monastic bodily deportment, a set of practices designed to express a sense of solemnity and dignity through posture, is known as *weiyi* (*īryāpatha*). This form of discipline is conceived

³⁴⁹ Each robe has a ring, and each ordinand learns how to wear and interlock three robes together by buckling the three rings.

³⁵⁰ See Appendix One: Photo 7.

³⁵¹ For the details of the whole procedure, see X60n1128.p667a01-669b7.

of as operating from the outside inward. According to *Upāli* in the *Śūraṅgama Sutra*, ‘disciplining the body can free it from all restraints, and then in disciplining the mind, so that it can be all-pervading freedom of mind.’³⁵² This highlights how, conceptually, physical discipline can serve as a preliminary step for the attainment of mental discipline, and thus spiritual freedom.

During the ordination ceremony, whether ordinands have previously been trained in *weiyi* or not, they are expected to know the details of how to carry themselves when walking, sitting, standing, and even sleeping, and execute such movements/postures to the highest standards of precision.³⁵³ In doing this, they are striving not only to differentiate themselves from their former life habits, but also to cultivate a refined awareness of the subtlety of their bodily movements, which is linked to their mental states. Every night after the lights are turned off, mentors visit each room to check that the ordinands’ sleeping postures meet the standard of *jixiangwo* (literally, ‘Buddhist-practice lying posture’), since in their view, it is important to practise mindfulness even during sleep.³⁵⁴

A classic poem describing ideal Buddhist deportment offers a flavour of the training ordinands undergo:

[C]hanting gently like a gently flowing stream, group walking like an organised flock of flying geese, putting palms together like holding up water in hands, standing still as a cup of oil placed on one’s head.³⁵⁵

As well as illustrating specific actions, the passage provides insight into the main principles that monks and nuns have to follow, and suggests that compliance with the actions one is taught leads one to achieve a deeper sense of tranquillity. Within the 30-day periods of the two triple-platform ordination ceremonies I attended at Chung Tai, all ordinands practised

³⁵² *Upāli* is one of the ten principal disciples of the Buddha. He lived as a barber before entering the monastic order and became the principal compiler of the *vinaya*. See Muller (2015).

³⁵³ See Appendix One: Photo 8.

³⁵⁴ It refers to the posture of sleeping on the right side with legs slightly bent and placed one over the other.

³⁵⁵ The poem is based on *Shami Luyi Yaolue Shuyi* (X60n1119.p317a7-10), which is an Explanatory Commentary on *Shami Luyi Yaolue* (J32nB277).

walking in pairs and in larger groups, in a very strict order, and without making any sound. When walking upstairs, they were taught to lift the front layers of their robes to prevent themselves from falling down; and when walking down, they lifted the rear layers to avoid tripping the person behind. Yet, as well as serving these practical functions, their walking training was said to help with the development of concentration and self-control.

Ju, the sitting cloth used in ordinands' daily practice, must be used in a variety of ways depending on the ceremonial occasion. Unfolding this item is not easy. That is, one has to very rapidly place it on the meditation cushion, while at the same time ensuring that it looks smooth and that its border is level with that of the cushion. Success in this action requires a lucid and uncluttered mind. After prostrating oneself, the sitting cloth must be folded into a tidy square shape: another test for the ordinand, especially since due to electrostatics, each layer of the cloth produced repulsion forces. Moreover, being conducted in a large group, it had to be done quickly to match the speed of others. The collective atmosphere and the strict communal training seemed to effectively leave them no space for their attention to wander.

It is important to note, however, that the degree of strictness in *weiyi* requirements varies sharply across different host monasteries. At Chung Tai, it was extremely strict and regimented, comparable to military training.³⁵⁶ In the dining room one day in 2005, when all the ordinands had just finished the midday dining ritual and were about to rise from their seats, the action of moving their plastic chairs made a great deal of noise. Though this was inadvertent, *kaitang heshang* (the chief mentor monk) made everyone stay in the dining hall to practise lifting and putting down their chairs without making any sound: 'If you wanted to win freedom

³⁵⁶ The physical movement of each individual was supervised so that it would be precise and identical with one's peer group, as bowing and the unfolding of *niṣīdana* had to be done at the same speed, with the body position kept at the same height. If anyone forgot how to act or was too slow to follow, he/she would be asked to come out to the front of the group and practice repeatedly until it was done correctly. During the training, a team of mentors would constantly patrol to check everyone's posture. If they noticed any mistakes, *yinli shifu* would immediately use *jiechi* (a wooden ruler) to correct them. Consequently, every ordinand would be most attentive and concentrate on listening to their instructions.

from *samsāra*, then let's start with this chair in your hand.' The ideology underpinning this instruction seems to reflect Heine and Wright's dictum that 'nothing was to be set apart as Buddhist practice, and yet nothing was not Buddhist practice.'³⁵⁷ In other words, how one treats a chair becomes relevant to the success of one's awakening, as it reflects one's inner state of residing in the present moment or not. Gradually, as the whole group practised, the sound of moving chairs became quieter. After this incident, everyone's actions became gentler and more attentive. In reflecting on this, one of my informants, a German nun who was one of the ordinands, commented that the strictness of their training had made it seem impersonal, but it actually helped her mind to be more focused and to remain in the present moment. Krägeloh has argued that

moral decisions require sensitivity to one's own actions [... so] increased mindfulness and self-awareness naturally lead to enhanced ethical decision making and decreased egocentric attitudes. Mindfulness practice leads to a reduction in automated cognitions and, thus, fewer egocentric and more objective attitudes.³⁵⁸

The physical practices emphasised in triple-platform ordination ceremonies – though seemingly trivial in themselves – tend to reinforce observational skills and self-discipline. Heirman and Torck pointed out that the philosophy behind demands on controlling one's body is motivated by 'the institutional and social structure, and from the way all people, monastic as well as lay, are connected to each other'.³⁵⁹ The training of *weiyi* not only aims at spiritual development but also embodies a mission to promote harmonious human relationship and conceptualise a collective identity.

3.3.4 *Randing fayuan*: Burning scars and making vows

According to *Chuanjie Zhengfan*, on the eve of Bodhisattva ordination, the ordinands should engage in a unique practice to seal their vow to follow the Bodhisattva Path over the

³⁵⁷ Heine and Wright (2004, 93).

³⁵⁸ Krägeloh (2016, 104).

³⁵⁹ Heirman and Torck (2012, 7).

long term.³⁶⁰ This is *rānding*, the ritual of burning the scalp, which is conducted only in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. Since the head is seen as the most precious part of the body in Chinese Buddhism,³⁶¹ the branding of one's scalp is said to show the highest respect and sincerity. More specifically, it is a devotional act expressing unshakeable determination to maintain the spirit of altruism propagated in the Bodhisattva precepts, regardless of the cost to one's own comfort and self-interest. It is also connected to emulation of self-immolation of Bodhisattva *Bhaiṣajyarāja*, who was described in the *Lotus Sutra* to burn the whole body as the utmost offering to the Buddha.³⁶² The practice is seen to test the inner resolve of the ordinands to uphold and commit to the Mahāyāna vows for a long term.

During a *rānding* ceremony at Chung Tai, three cones of moxa approximately 2.5 cm high and glued together with banana paste are placed evenly across the scalp of each ordinand, with a few thin pieces of watermelon rind placed nearby to reduce the temperature on nearby areas of the head during the burning of the incense. All ordinands kneel on the floor and cover their shoulders with their sitting cloth to protect their robes from the burning ashes that fall.³⁶³

As collective chanting begins, the preceptors and mentors light the cones on each ordinand's head with a long stick of burning incense. The pain gradually becomes intense and spreads into the deeper layers of the skin. Many ordinands concentrate on chanting the Buddha's name or taking a vow from the *Dafangbianfobaoen Jing (Great Skillful Means Sutra on the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness)*: 'If a hot iron wheel were spinning on top of me, I would never abandon my vow to practise the Bodhisattva Way, due to this suffering.'³⁶⁴

Feelings of pain are naturally highly subjective. In my own case, when the ritual was completed, I had an unprecedented experience of my mind being in an extreme state of

³⁶⁰ X60n1128.p658b18-659c4.

³⁶¹ The idea of the 'head' being the most precious part of the body can be found in *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (T25n1509.p751a24-27). Also see Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed March 18, 2020).

³⁶² T09n262.p53b4-18.

³⁶³ See Appendix One: Photo 9.

³⁶⁴ T03n156.p29c21-23.

alertness, and motionless; and my body felt as light as a feather. One informant commented that *randing* reflected the sincerest possible wish to make an offering to the Buddha, and that its deep and indelible marks (known as *jieba*) served as a reminder of the moral precepts he held.³⁶⁵ And of course, *jieba* are also a distinctive physical symbol of having undergone triple-platform ordination in Chinese Buddhism.³⁶⁶

However, this tradition has begun to change. In 1983, the BAC formally banned the ritual of scalp-burning at ordination, citing health concerns.³⁶⁷ Religious reasons for abandoning it have also been cited: for example, by Ven. Yin-Shun, who regarded it as an importation from Zoroastrianism.³⁶⁸ On the other hand, Ven. Sheng-Yan and Ven. Hsing-Yun both expressed the view that *ran ding* reinforced their religious vows and strengthened their minds, but also stressed that it should be voluntary. When I was conducting fieldwork at Yunmen in 2019, the *ran ding* ritual was not included in the public ordination procedure, in compliance with Chinese government policy. Nevertheless, many ordinands chose to conduct it in private, either during or after the ordination period, with the help of their monastic peers.

The practice of self-immolation seems irrational, almost like an act of ‘self-torture’, as Johannes put it.³⁶⁹ However, the practice of scalp-burning is interpreted rather differently by insider practitioners who perform it. Benn has pointed out the diverse range of meanings and motivations that underlie such practices, including ‘heroic acts’ to rescue sentient beings, imitation of the Bodhisattva way, proof of having attained enlightenment, a defensive response to the state, and a protection against a disaster.³⁷⁰ Buswell, noting that Korean Zen monks burn their arms instead of their scalps during novice ordination, has argued that this action represents

³⁶⁵ Taken on Oct 17, 2008 from a monk ordinand’s diary published on the Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2008, 179).

³⁶⁶ Heirman and Torck (2012, 142) state that, ‘the most prominent symbol’ of a Buddhist monastic is shaved head and ‘moxa burning’, which is still practised but is optional in some places.

³⁶⁷ Guoyi (accessed September 7, 2020). See also Chiu (2016, 12).

³⁶⁸ Ven. Yin-Shun thinks that the ritual was imported by ancient Indian custom of *abhiṣeka*, which was practised during a king’s crowning ceremony (Ven. Yin-Shun 2011, 180-81).

³⁶⁹ Prip-Møller et al. (1937).

³⁷⁰ Benn (2007, 201).

‘the new novices’ nonattachment to the body and disentanglement from worldly affairs.’³⁷¹ In other words, what links Chinese and Korean monastics who burn themselves is not praise or celebration of suffering, but rather, a desire to cultivate the mind’s resilience and steadfastness in the face of it, as well as a religiously motivated spirit of self-sacrifice, related to their future Bodhisattva careers.

An ordinand who completes the full-ordination ceremony officially joins the *saṃgha*. This has two meanings. First, broadly speaking, it connotes that he/she has formally become a member of *shifang seng* (ten directions of *saṃgha*). His/her name, along with those of each preceptor, the three masters and seven witnesses will be announced on the wall outside the ordination platform. And in theory, an ordination certificate implies that any monastery in the Chinese Buddhist world will acknowledge his/her monastic identity.³⁷² Secondly, in the monastic community where he/she lives, sleeping arrangements, duties, and chances of attending the *busa* (*poṣadha*) ceremony will be arranged according to his/her new fully ordained status.³⁷³

This chapter has suggested that the training for and rituals of the Chinese triple-platform ordination offer an intensive means of transforming each ordinand’s inner state, with the aim of rendering that person more capable of observing the Buddhist precepts. The ordinands are guided to detach themselves from their past ignorance, to build self-awareness about their future conduct via acts of repentance, to reinforce their vows to follow the Bodhisattva Path through the ascetic practice of burning scalp scars, and to manage their inner discipline through cultivating attention to their bodily movements. Considered as a whole, the ritual process is designed to strengthen an ordinand’s patience in the face of adversity, enhance his/her

³⁷¹ Buswell (1992, 84).

³⁷² A nun informant from Mainland China, who studied in Taiwan in 2019, told me that the statue of being fully ordained in Taiwan would no longer be recognised by the Chinese government due to changes of political policy. So she had to take the full ordination at a temple on the Mainland.

³⁷³ *Busa* is a ceremony for monks and nuns to recite their precepts separately every fortnight.

awareness of the subtleties of body and mind, and internalise Buddhist belief and monastic regulations regarding what is right and wrong. These purposes are underpinned by the view that any erroneous behaviours or attitudes may not only cut one's monastic career short, but also have negative impacts on the whole monastic community.

My data on ordination also indicates that the development of mindfulness and the upholding of monastic regulations are interrelated. Many scholars have previously argued that there is a 'reciprocal relation' between mindfulness and morality, as Garfield puts it: i.e., that mindfulness contributes to the extirpation of immorality, while moral actions increase mindfulness.³⁷⁴ Similarly, Dreyfus highlighted that, in Buddhist teachings, the function of mindfulness is the integration of 'an evaluative component' to distinguish unwholesome mental states from wholesome ones.³⁷⁵ Lin argues, based on a passage in the *Madhyama Āgama*, that upholding precepts should start with mindfulness, since only it can guard a person's mind against interruptions by the habitual reactions of greed, anger, and ignorance.³⁷⁶ And Ven. Jian-Shu, a Chung Tai nun, endorses the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*'s statement that 'collecting the mind inward is the spirit of upholding precepts', noting that upholding precepts, in turn, increases one's awareness of one's deluded and bad thoughts, the prompt purging of which leads one's mind to become stable.³⁷⁷ All these discussions emphasise that to be able to act in accordance with monastic regulations, one needs one to guard one's mind; and that the latter process is linked to the cultivation of mindfulness. From this perspective, mindfulness can be seen as a fundamental basis for people's moral lives as monastics. In secular circles, mindfulness often becomes synonymous with concentration,³⁷⁸ but in monastic cultivation, concentration is merely a starting point, as mindfulness is not just about 'paying attention in a particular way'

³⁷⁴ Garfield (2012).

³⁷⁵ Dreyfus (2011).

³⁷⁶ Lin (accessed September 1, 2020). See also T01n26.p485c28-86a2.

³⁷⁷ Ven. Jian-Shu (accessed September 6, 2020). See also T19n945.p131c13-15.

³⁷⁸ Kabat-Zinn (2015, 1481) states, 'after all this talk of mindfulness, what is it really anyway?...not bad for something that basically boils down to paying attention'.

as Kabat-Zinn has taught,³⁷⁹ but rather is formed, grounded, and supported in a moral framework geared towards spiritual enlightenment.

³⁷⁹ Kabat-Zinn (1994, 4).

Chapter 4 Daily monastic life

Having successfully completed the month-long ritualised ordination/training described in the previous chapter, newly ordained monks and nuns return to their own respective monastic communities, either resuming their old duties/taking up new ones or choose to enter a *foxueyuan* (Buddhist seminary) to study Chinese Buddhist doctrine systematically. Tseng argues, ‘Chan Buddhism is based on the belief that enlightenment is realized by practice, not by explanations or knowledge.’³⁸⁰ Buswell has, from his monastic experience, highlighted the importance of spiritual cultivation in monastic daily life, which he states, ‘interface directly with doctrine and practice. The monks, after all, come to realize their enlightenment through the daily routine of the monastery.’³⁸¹ This chapter explores how the abstract idea of *zhengnian* (right mindfulness) is implemented and practised as operational knowledge within a monastery, and how it relates to each aspect of daily communal life there. It is divided into two main parts, the first looking at the two focal monasteries, and the second, at their seminaries. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the idea of *zhengnian* presents itself in various relational aspects within the monastic community.

In Chinese, one of the names for a Buddhist monastery is *daochang* (a field for the Way). The *Chanlin Baoxun* likewise highlights its function as a space for *qixin xiudao* (resting the mind and pursuing the Way).³⁸² In my experience, many of the people who come to live in Chan monasteries are seeking both a place, and a means, to rest their minds. Ven. Wei-Chueh’s question to his nun disciple, ‘Where is your mind?’ in Chapter 2 has its parallel in the *Diamond Sutra*, where Subhuti asks the Buddha how to abide in the mind and subdue one’s thoughts.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Tseng (2011, 101).

³⁸¹ Buswell (1993, 291).

³⁸² X64n1262.p438c22-23.

³⁸³ The sutra is particularly prominent in Chan tradition and was first translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva (344-413) in 401 (T08n0235). It has multiple Chinese versions, for example, translated by a north Indian monk Bodhiruci (5th-6th centuries) in 509 (T08n0236), by Paramārtha (499-569) in 562 (T08n0237), by Xuanzang (602-664) in 648 (T07n0220), and by Yijing (635-713) in 703 (T08n0239). Many monastics in this study often recite the sutra as their daily Buddhist lesson.

The Buddha's answer to Subhuti's question was that one should 'give rise to a pure mind that is not attached to form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas. The mind should act without any attachments.'³⁸⁴ This statement offers us a new angle to look into the inner practice taking place in Chan monasteries today, in terms of the members' efforts regarding 'unattached practice' in one's mind. Ven. Wei-Chueh admonished the Chung Tai monastic community to 'abide firmly in right mindfulness; follow the nature of awareness.'³⁸⁵ In the case of Yunmen, the abbot told me that practising right mindfulness refers to the mind dwelling in Buddhist teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, Twelfefold Condition, and the Bodhisattva Path, and ultimately, abiding in *foxing* (Buddha nature).³⁸⁶

Yunmen Monastery maintains its prominent position in contemporary Chinese Chan Buddhism not only due to its historical significance but also because it presents a valuable case that has grown in every aspect since the Chinese reform in the 1980s, owing to the devoted efforts of several masters who rejuvenated the Chan Buddhist tradition.³⁸⁷ As a male-dominated institution, Yunmen comprised about 80 monks in 1990,³⁸⁸ but its population has since more than doubled, to include 60 permanent residents and more than 150 monk students. Many senior monks in Yunmen are the disciples of Ven. Foyuan. Many have the character of *ming* (brightness) in their dharma names. The younger monks who are the disciples of the current abbot, Ven. Mingxiang, have the character of *yao* (luminance) in their dharma names. It is also affiliated with two nunneries: nearby Xiaoxitian (Small Western Paradise), home to between 60 and 80 nuns;³⁸⁹ and Qianfota Si (Thousand Buddhas Pagoda Monastery),³⁹⁰ five

³⁸⁴ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2009a, 9).

³⁸⁵ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed June 3, 2019).

³⁸⁶ For further discussions, see Chapter 5.

³⁸⁷ The monastery was elected as *xianjin jiti* (a role model) among all religious organisations in China by the government, as well as a model religious site in the Guangdong province.

³⁸⁸ App (1994, xiii).

³⁸⁹ It was founded in 1986 by Ven. Foyuan. The nun students mainly focus on *vinaya* studies and are scrupulous about observing the precepts and monastic rules, concentrating on their personal cultivation and having little interaction with the outside world. The nuns also have their own farmland to grow vegetables and practice a self-sustained ascetic lifestyle.

³⁹⁰ Its name derives from an iron pagoda that enshrines thousands of Buddha statues dating back to 965 CE and

hours' drive away in Meizhou, eastern Guangdong Province, which hosts around 100 nun residents and 70 nun students. Interactions between the monks and nuns affiliated with Yunmen Monastery have become less frequent since 2009, when Ven. Foyuan passed away and his successors have instituted the stricter gender segregation that is the norm for monasteries in Mainland China.

Generally speaking, any monastic can live at Yunmen temporarily or permanently.³⁹¹ During their residence, each monk is regularly given small sums for living expenses,³⁹² which they can save up to fund their onward journeys, or use to buy daily necessities. I was told that, because many monks come to Yunmen from various provinces of Mainland China, the monastery has adopted a lenient policy for managing them, which embraces their regional and cultural differences. As per one monk informant, any monk is allowed to stay as long as he can adhere to the major Buddhist precepts and does not deliberately disturb others. Their travelling far from their hometowns and leaving their comfort zones for the purpose of cultivation of the mind is welcomed, as reflecting the original meaning of renunciation: *chujia*, literally 'leaving home'.

McRae has characterised the Chan tradition as 'overwhelmingly male-dominated.'³⁹³ However, the accuracy of this can be disputed in the case of Taiwan as the majority of vocational monastics are female. Chung Tai Chan Monastery comprises around 1,600 monastics, the majority of whom are nuns.³⁹⁴ Most members were ordained by the founding

were established in 2002 by Ven. Foyuan's prominent nun disciple Ven. Minghui (1947-present). The nunnery has a vibrant atmosphere, and its nuns are actively involved in introducing Buddhism to the general public through various activities: instructing meditation and chanting; organising children's events, art exhibitions, and charity events; and teaching vegetarian cooking. See the official website of Qianfota Si: <http://www.qianfotasi.com>.

³⁹¹ Some monks stay there for a period of time before leaving for some other monastery to advance their studies and career plans.

³⁹² See Appendix One: Photo 11.

³⁹³ McRae (2003, 9).

³⁹⁴ The male to female ratio is approximately 1:3 or 4. Anyone who would like to be a monk or nun is required to live in the monastery for around six months and go through rigorous evaluation to prove if he/she is suitable to monastic life.

abbot, Ven. Wei-Chueh.³⁹⁵ Some live in the headquarters, whilst others serve in one of Chung Tai's 108 global branches.³⁹⁶

As a vibrant dual-*samgha* community, Chung Tai encapsulates the two key characteristics of Taiwanese Buddhism mentioned by Yu: active engagement with society, and a strikingly high ratio of nuns to monks.³⁹⁷ Monastics of both sexes have an equal chance to receive their monastic education there, and have access to similar career opportunities, though in practice most branches of Chung Tai are headed by nuns due to the larger number of nuns.³⁹⁸ In other respects, too, its organisational scheme has evolved beyond the traditional Chinese monastery system, to include IT & audio broadcasting centre, magazine publication centre, a tofu factory, carpentry, blacksmithing department, car repair division, and a monastic garment-making department, etc. It would be hard to disagree with Brown and Cheng's assessment of Chung Tai as 'well-developed, organizationally, financially strong, internationally well-known, and marked by huge following'.³⁹⁹ Moreover, as a modern Taiwanese Chan monastery, Chung Tai identifies itself as a legitimate heir to ancient Chinese Chan Buddhism, and makes regular and serious efforts to forge ties with Chan Buddhism in Mainland China. In 2006, for example, Chung Tai formed an alliance with Lingyin Si in Hangzhou, on the basis of their shared Linji Chan lineage.⁴⁰⁰

I have observed that the learning atmosphere in Chinese Buddhist monasteries differs markedly between the Mainland and Taiwan. Di has argued that 'the "temple culture" (the

³⁹⁵ The majority of Chung Tai members share the Chinese character *jian* (see) in their dharma names, indicating their Chan lineage. In 2017, the monastery welcomed their new generation of disciples when the current abbot ordained 20 people on 8th April; the act is seen as essential for the continuity of their lineage transmission. The new generation has the character *xing* (star) in their dharma names.

³⁹⁶ In Taiwan, Chung Tai branches are spread throughout the country. Overseas branches are located in the USA, Australia, Italy, Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Japan.

³⁹⁷ Yu (2013, 23).

³⁹⁸ Each branch is headed by a single sex, either monks or nuns, based on the rule of celibacy and gender segregation. There are usually three or more monastics in one branch, depending on its operational size.

³⁹⁹ Brown and Cheng (2012, 79).

⁴⁰⁰ Lingyin Si is one of the largest, oldest, and wealthiest monasteries in Mainland China and was established by an Indian monk Huili (?-?) in 328. For the alliance event, see Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed September 13, 2020).

culture on a communal level) would differ given different national contexts'.⁴⁰¹ Yunmen and Chung Tai have distinctive temple-level culture. The attitude towards monastics moving around frequently to study at different monasteries and other Buddhist institutions in Mainland China appears more permissive. Monks and nuns in Taiwan – especially those affiliated with well-organised monasteries – seem to be expected to stay in one monastery throughout their career. As per Chung Tai philosophy, the real dharma is already here; therefore, there is no need to waste time seeking it in other places. When I was a nun student at Chung Tai, I often heard a saying that not every Buddhist institute today spreads the 'right' and 'complete' view of Buddhism at the age of *mofa* (the decline of the dharma).⁴⁰² As the result, the ancient itinerant practice known as *xingjiao* (travelling from monastery to monastery to study Buddhism from various teachers) was discouraged.⁴⁰³ Meanwhile, monastics from other institutions can only visit Chung Tai, and are not allowed to live or study there.

The monastic organisations of both Chung Tai and Yunmen are divided into two parts: *changzhu* (administration) and *foxueyuan* (seminaries).⁴⁰⁴ The abbots are also the heads of their respective monasteries' seminaries. The administration division of Yunmen generally accords with Chinese Chan monastic tradition. That is, under the abbot, there are four main departments: the so-called *sida tangkou*, including *chantang* (the meditation hall), *kufang* (the treasury), *ketang* (the reception office), and *yiboliao* (the abbot's office).⁴⁰⁵ Theoretically, there is no rank structure within the Chinese *samgha*; every monastic receives an equal share of food, and all

⁴⁰¹ Di (2018, 452).

⁴⁰² For the concept of *mofa*, see Liu (2018).

⁴⁰³ The custom of *xingjiao* is often recorded in classical Chan literature as a popular monastic practice for seeking guidance from enlightened masters; see, among others, *Guzunsu Yulu* (X68n1315).

⁴⁰⁴ See Appendix Two.

⁴⁰⁵ The monastic organisational system dates back to the Song dynasty, and there are 23 types of deacons listed in the *Changyuan Qinggui* (X63n1245). In *Chixiu Baizhang Qinggui* (*Revision of Baizhang's Pure Rules*), a work on the regulations for monastic life compiled during the Yuan dynasty by Ven. Dongyang Dehui, who claimed to draw on a currently nonextant work composed by Chan Master Baizhang (720-814) during the Tang dynasty, there are more than 80 types of deacons; see T48n2025. The number of deacons in a monastery depends on its size. For Baizhang monastic regulations, see Ichimura et al. (2006). For the study of monastic rules of purity (*qinggui*), see Chiu (2019).

work together in rotation to operate their monastery. All money donated to a given institution by the laity is pooled,⁴⁰⁶ reflecting the spirit of *lihetongjun* (sharing benefits harmoniously) as described in the *Liuhejing* (*Six Harmonious Dharmas*).⁴⁰⁷ In practice, however, the structure of both my focal monastic organisations reveals a hierarchy of positions corresponding to different levels of authority and obligations. The current abbots in both monasteries were not elected through any kind of democratic process, but directly appointed by their Chan masters; and the remaining posts are filled by the abbots.⁴⁰⁸

4.1 *Wutang Gongke*: Five lessons

In 2016, in response to my question ‘How does Yunmen lead its monastic members to awaken their Mind in daily life?’, its abbot responded:

Nowadays, most people do not possess an excellent gift for spiritual cultivation [*gen-qi-bu-hao*]. Therefore, what we can do at least is to follow the heritage of Chan practices, the five lessons [*wutang gongke*] and agricultural Chan [*nongchan*] as our spiritual direction.⁴⁰⁹

It highlights that how the monastic living environment facilitates, or might facilitate, reaching the religious goals of Chan Buddhism is crucially linked with *Wutang gongke*. *Wutang gongke* refers to the schedule of a traditional Chan monastery,⁴¹⁰ comprising morning/evening services, the dining ritual, communal tasks, meditation, and reciting precepts fortnightly. The term *nongchan* describes a self-sustaining monastic lifestyle that integrates Chan practices into a variety of farm chores.⁴¹¹ Yunmen and Chung Tai both emphasise the importance of

⁴⁰⁶ For example, the donated money goes to Chung Tai’s various foundations. See Appendix Three: Chung Tai Foundations.

⁴⁰⁷ *Liuhejing* involves six ways for monastics to live in harmony: sharing the same viewpoints/goals, abiding the same precepts, practising together harmoniously, not quarrelling, experiencing the inner peace and happiness that arise from practising together harmoniously, and sharing benefits harmoniously.

⁴⁰⁸ Each position is initially agreed by a supervisory team of vice abbots and vice abbesses and then is approved by the abbot. The announcement of post shifting is posted on the bulletin boards in each office and dormitory areas, and an electronic version of announcement is delivered via emails to all of its global branches spontaneously.

⁴⁰⁹ Fieldnote recorded in 2016.

⁴¹⁰ Wei (1990, 37) suggests that *wutang gongke* began to take shape during the Ming dynasty and has some variations from one monastery to another in terms of its precise content.

⁴¹¹ The *nongchan* tradition is often traced back to the idea of ‘one day without work, one day without eating’, which is traditionally believed to have originated with Chan master Baizhang during the Tang dynasty.

preserving and following the traditions of *wutang gongke* and *nongchan*.

Because collective practice is fundamental to Buddhist monastic life, the idea of *suizhong* (cooperating with the monastic community) is highly valued, and obliges monastics to participate in every scheduled monastery activity without arriving late, leaving early, or abstaining. Involvement in the repetitive daily practices known as *jiaxing* (literally, ‘supplementary practices’)⁴¹² is held to be essential, especially for those who have not reached full awakening, as they help one to shake off mundane habitus and prepare for enlightenment. With the exception of those whose senior roles take them away from these practices,⁴¹³ attending *wutang gongke* is regarded as a basic obligation and duty of every monastery member, and failing to take part is seen as detrimental to their spiritual development.

During my stay at Yunmen, a senior nun who lived next door checked on me every day to make sure that I participated in the morning chanting exercise, and constantly monitored what I did in my free time. This exemplified how discipline is imposed on individual members by the collective, though peers as well as senior members of the community are frequently involved. As the *Daxue* asks, ‘when ten eyes see, when ten fingers indicate, is this not to be taken seriously?’⁴¹⁴ This saying highlights how the actions of individuals come under the scrutiny of a wider public. From this perspective, communal life comes with a certain level of pressure, which naturally boosts one’s self-awareness of one’s thinking, speech, and actions.

The day in a monastery starts at 3.45 a.m., when the sound of striking a wooden board wakes everyone up.⁴¹⁵ The morning chanting session takes around one and half hours and is

Scholars hold conflicting views on the tradition of ‘physical labour’ for monastics. For instance, Poceski (2003) and Jia (2015) argued that Baizhang did not set up these monastic rules regarding ‘work’, and even questioned his historical existence. On the other hand, Du and Wei (2008) argued that monastics, especially noices and those of low rank, were engaged in productive labour long before the Tang dynasty.

⁴¹² See Muller (2020).

⁴¹³ For example, kitchen nuns may not have time to attend daily morning sessions.

⁴¹⁴ *Daxue* is one of the ‘Four Books’ in Confucianism and is believed to be written by Zengzi (505-432 BCE), a famous disciple of Confucius (551-479 BCE).

⁴¹⁵ In the case of Yunmen, the time to get up is even earlier when the rituals, such as *pufu*, are held as a part of the morning chanting.

followed by *guotang*.⁴¹⁶ After breakfast, each monastic engages in cleaning his/her immediate area of responsibility. From 8.30 to 11.30 a.m., resident members work and fulfil their administrative roles, while student monks and nuns study or attend lectures at the seminary. Lunch is again conducted in the form of a ‘dining ritual’, and is followed by a break at midday. The afternoon schedule is similar to the morning one, i.e., centres around either working or studying, and the evening is normally taken up with self-study.⁴¹⁷ Bedtime is around 10 p.m.

Morgan has highlighted that ‘collective experience, and doing things together, calibrates feelings and emotions.’⁴¹⁸ Accordingly, the daily activities of *wutang gongke* are seen as powerful ways of transforming and purifying the self and shortening the distance between an individual and his/her religious goal. Daily morning and evening chanting,⁴¹⁹ for example, are depicted in *Erkehejie* as a bridle for a good horse, i.e., a tool for combating a wandering and idle mind.⁴²⁰ *Muyu* (a wooden fish) controls the chanting speed,⁴²¹ and *yinqing* (a silver-coloured hand bell) instructs the assembly when to make their prostrations. The dharma instruments are said to carry out the function of waking up the mind and thus helping give rise to mindfulness. During chanting sessions, everyone in the group strives to follow the same rhythm, tones, and tempo. Everyone stands in lines according to their monastic seniority, and their voices are expected to follow consonantly with the rest of the crowd. A *sengzhi* usually patrols around with a wooden stick to ensure everyone’s physical posture and behaviour accord with monastic standards.⁴²² Through this practice, one learns to let go of ego and to

⁴¹⁶ *Guotang* is a dining ritual in Chinese Buddhism, customarily practised twice per day; at breakfast and lunch. For details of its actual performance, see 4.1.2.

⁴¹⁷ The rule of not eating after noon is not strictly practised in Chinese monasteries as well as the two focal communities. For more details, see Chiu (2015).

⁴¹⁸ Morgan (2009).

⁴¹⁹ Ven. Da-Tian suggests that the chanting tradition can be traced back to the famous Pure Land Master Ven. Daoan (312-385). See Ven. Da-Tian (2014).

⁴²⁰ See Ven. Xing-Ci (2016, 1). *Erkehejie* is a guidebook for morning and evening chanting in Chinese Buddhist monasteries, compiled by Tiantai master Ven. Xing-Ci (1881-1950).

⁴²¹ *Muyu* is a wooden dharma instrument, round in shape and carved with a fish-scale pattern on its top. Drawing on the fact that fish do not close their eyes during sleep, the fish motif is created to symbolise ‘wakefulness’ and diligence.

⁴²² *Sengzhi* is someone whose duty is to maintain the order among monastics and check everyone’s attendance

cooperate with others, which tends to heal disharmony in the community. And a harmonious communal environment, in turn, provides a base from which individuals can seek inner peace. Taking part in such daily practices is also regarded as a means of enhancing the participants' mindful concentration, reflexivity, and obedience.

4.1.1 Rising early as a sign of awakening

To a certain extent, as explained above, the collective activities exemplified in *wutang gongke* enhance individuals' power to discipline and, potentially, shake off their *xiqi* (unwholesome habitual tendencies). Beyond this, however, the process is a tangible point of entry to the eventual achievement of awakening. For example, the common monastic practice of rising early in the morning, i.e., one's literal awakening, implies combating the desire to sleep. As 'waking up' in Buddhist doctrine is a metaphor for awakening, 'sleeping' symbolises the opposite. So strong are these associations that the *Bequeathed Teachings Sutra* states that 'you will gain nothing by passing your whole life in vain through sleep'.⁴²³ One is taught to deal with sleep cautiously.⁴²⁴ As Ven. Foyuan said, 'you should keep mindfulness and do not dream while sleeping. If you lose [mindfulness] in your sleep and think of something delicious or playful, or even about girls, then you should immediately get up to meditate, recite sutras, and make prostrations.'⁴²⁵ Thus, this indicates that mindfulness practices also take place in the sleeping to guard the mind from the intrusion of unwholesome thoughts and desires.

Meanwhile, early rising is a challenge, especially because Chan monasteries are located in mountainous areas, which are usually humid and cold, and have no heating facilities. Thus, in leaving the warmth and comfort of bed before dawn, quickly folding the heavy cotton duvet

in gathering. For example, if a participant forgets to put his/her palms together or is not well aligned with the rest of the group, the *sengzhi* will gently press his own shoulders or palms as a reminder of what one has to do.

⁴²³ The *Bequeathed Teachings Sutra* or *The Sutra on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching* (T12n0389) is a brief Māhāyāna sutra containing instructions left by Gautama Buddha before his nirvana. It is said to be translated by Kumārajīva (344-413) into Chinese around 400 CE.

⁴²⁴ For a study of the sleeping practices discussed in Buddhist monastic disciplinary texts, see Heirman (2012).

⁴²⁵ Yunmen Monastery (2010a, 61).

into a square tofu, one makes the cold part of one's daily practice. Ven. Wei-Chueh taught his disciples that they needed right mindfulness to battle *hunchen* (drowsiness), and were more likely to achieve it if they contemplated the dharma, such as the Buddha's virtues or teachings on *paramita* (perfection).⁴²⁶ To me, this suggests a close link between mindfulness, considered as clarity of mind or absence of drowsiness, and the defeat of sleep/ignorance. On a more practical level, rising early conveys a sense of diligence to one's monastic peers and superiors – though diligence, too, is held to be important to the success of mental cultivation. Whenever someone oversleeps in a monastery, he/she will be reminded by others of the uselessness of such an indulgence: an aspect of communal life that provides an extra incentive to conquer one's attachment to sleep.

4.1.2 Eating for the dharma

As Khare points out, 'food occupies a central place in Buddhist philosophy and is understood in a broader sense than merely the materials.'⁴²⁷ Eating practices in a Chan monastery are conceived of not merely as tasting the food, but as tasting the dharma itself. The body of dining etiquette evolved by Mahāyāna Buddhist monastic communities, *guotang*, reflects an integration of original Indian Buddhist ideas with local Chinese social and cultural norms.

Before every meal, monastics recite the *gongyangji*: a verse offering the meal to the Buddha, dharma, *saṃgha*, and all sentient beings. Then, those present listen to the monk chant-leader, the *weinuo*, recite the following standard chant: 'The Buddha regulated his disciples to practice five contemplations. If we eat the food with a scattered mind and meaningless words, it is difficult to digest the food as a gift from our donors.'⁴²⁸ In other words, the chanting is

⁴²⁶ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed September 9, 2020).

⁴²⁷ Khare (1992, 187).

⁴²⁸ Traditionally, a dining hall in a Chinese Chan monastery is called *wuguantang* (the Hall of Five Contemplations). The Verse of Five Contemplations is read as follows: 'First, considering how much effort produced this food, we reflect on its origins. Second, mindful of the deficiencies of our own virtue and

intended to produce gratitude regarding the meal, and to remind all eating to do so with mindfulness that will make them worthy of the benevolence of those who have provided the food.

Apart from this, dining takes place in complete silence. One is expected to begin by taking three mouthfuls of rice and making vows silently: at the first mouthful, to eliminate all evil; at the second, to cultivate all good; and at the third, to release all sentient beings. Monastics are taught to take food as medicine, to restrain the mind from becoming attached to flavours.⁴²⁹ Specifically, Ven. Wei-Chueh taught his disciples that mindfulness in eating means to constantly retain *juexing* of which foods taste sour, sweet, bitter, or spicy, and yet not become greedy for good-tasting ones or angry about the others.⁴³⁰ He quoted the teaching of Chan master Huangbo (d. 850 CE), that one should eat ‘all day long without biting a grain of rice’, to illustrate that the essence of mindfulness in eating is to prevent the tranquillity of one’s mind not being disturbed by one’s sense of taste.⁴³¹ That is, the aim of mindfulness in eating food is neither revelling in its flavours nor dazedly disconnecting oneself from them. Rather, it is to enter an internal state of purity that transcends the duality of liking or disliking.

When most of the monastics have finished eating, a *sengzhi* walks along the central aisle, halfway to the Buddha statue, and bows. This signals the end of the meal. The assembly finishes by chanting a verse dedicating merit to all donors, and wishing all sentient beings a good life accompanied by five benefits: health, strength, longevity, peace, and eloquence. Despite the fact that Mahāyāna monastics do not perform daily alms-collecting and do not

practice, we strive to be worthy of this offering. Third, we take restraining the mind and avoiding faults such as greed as the essential principle. Fourth, we use this food properly as good medicine, to keep our bodies from withering away. Fifth, for the sake of attaining the way, we now receive this food’ (Foulk 2009).

⁴²⁹ Meals in a Chinese monastery are strictly vegetarian. In Chung Tai, both monks and nuns dine and chant in the same hall and receive the same food. Monks are seated on the righthand side of a hall, regarded to be higher-ranked, and nuns on the left. Such spacial arrangement reflects a mixture of gender equality and gender difference.

⁴³⁰ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 9, 2020). *Juexing* (the awareness), used in Ven. Wei-Chueh’s talks, is a popular synonym for indicating one’s intrinsic Buddha nature. See more details in Chapter 5.

⁴³¹ T48n2012A.p384a12-13. Huangbo was a disciple of Chan Master Baizhang Huaihai (720-814).

engage with food donors on a regular basis, the spirit of *guotang* seems to intensify the relationship between monastics and their lay supporters. Memorising the virtues of their food donors arguably generates a stronger motivation to repay their generous support by retaining ‘a pure mind’ while eating. As such, when engaged in whilst eating, mindfulness practice carries a deeper meaning, gratitude, alongside its usual aim of individual spiritual transcendence.⁴³²

4.1.3 Monastic labour as mind-cultivation

Buswell highlights that in Korean Sŏn monasteries, it is normative for the ordained members and even the more senior novices to spend most of their time in meditation, while physical labour is handed over to new and junior novices. Indeed, ‘after a monk has finished his postulancy and perhaps a few years of service to his home monastery, he could conceivably pass the rest of his life in the meditation hall, doing virtually no manual labour at all.’⁴³³ This contrasts sharply with the Chan tradition in Chinese monasteries, where many of the influential masters including the Sixth Patriarch (Huineng, 638-713)⁴³⁴ and Chan master Guishan Lingyou (771-853)⁴³⁵ have placed great emphasis on physical chores and labour as golden opportunities to find one’s own true nature. Chung Tai and Yunmen monasteries likewise direct their monastics to engage in this physical labour as a form of mind-cultivation, and this is manifested particularly in their preservation of *nongchan* tradition.

In April 2019, during a photographic exhibition at Yunmen’s newly inaugurated library,

⁴³² In Kawanami’s (2020, 74-75) study, the feeling of gratitude is also found among Myanmar’s monks who receive food offered by lay donors.

⁴³³ Buswell (1992, 221).

⁴³⁴ The Platform Sutra (T48n2008.p348a14-349b03) shows that Huineng’s spiritual journey began with heavy physical labour. He was assigned by the Fifth Patriarch to grind rice grains for eight months before even given a chance to listen to the dharma. His case seems to exemplify how manual labour was part of a learning process to prepare oneself in the many stages to seek enlightenment.

⁴³⁵ In *Tanzhou Guishan Lingyou Chanshi Yulu* (T47n1989.p577a22-b11), it tells a story about Guishan Lingyou who worked as a chef in the kitchen, and how he defeated the head preacher monk in answering a question competently posed by his teacher Baizhang. As a result, Guishan Lingyou was chosen as the abbot of a 1,500-resident monastery. This story appears to highlight the value of physical labour to enhance mind-cultivation and in gaining wisdom.

I had a chance to ask a highly ranked monk how Ven. Foyuan taught his disciples. He pointed to the photos on the wall and uttered *gan-huo-er*! three times. Referring to helping out or labouring in the field, this was one of the phrases I heard most frequently at Yunmen. For its inhabitants, *gan-huo-er* is not only an essential method for tempering one's lazy mind and developing mental resilience, but also a channel through which Chan practice is brought into daily life.

Likewise, Ven. Mingjing, the head of Yunmen's nunnery, told me that whenever she had worries that led her to seek Ven. Foyuan's advice in person, he always gave her some work to do, rather than any kind of lengthy verbal response. And, by the time she had finished the work he had assigned her, she realised that she had 'forgotten' what she had initially consulted him about; i.e., her worries had disappeared whilst doing the work. Deeply influenced by this method of teaching, she told me that physical labour embodies Buddhist teaching, and that arduous work leads to mind cultivation. In her story, *gan-huo-er* represented the way she practised mindfulness, and transformed her anxiety into tranquillity.

Yunmen Monastery owns 33,350 square metres of rice-growing land and harvests two rice crops annually, large enough to support 300 to 400 residents and lay volunteers. Another 40,000 square metres of land are used for growing sweet potatoes, corn, peanuts, lotus roots, ginger, and so on, also for the monastic community itself to consume. Its vast holdings of agricultural land ensure its self-sufficiency. Every monk, including monk students and even the abbot, participate in agricultural activities, leading it to be regarded as the best exemplar of the *nongchan* tradition and a model for other Chan monasteries across China.⁴³⁶

In August 2016, I participated Yunmen's harvest and planting. On a sunny early morning, all the monks and a number of lay volunteers gathered around the rice fields and began proficiently cutting the rice by hand and tying it into bunches. The abbot was in charge

⁴³⁶ Yunmen Monastery (2015, 10).

of a threshing machine. By late morning, hundreds of monks and university students were hard at work carrying rice stalks from the field to an open space for drying them. I was stopped on the way by a few students for a discussion about Buddhism. But a monk quickly came over to stop our conversation, saying, ‘*Gan-huo-er* first!’ These echoed comments made to me by various Yunmen monk informants, that Buddhism was not about talking, but about actual practice.

This idea may have been fostered by Ven. Xuyun, who is known to have told his disciples that ‘transplanting the seedling is the Way’, and to have taught them to observe their minds for any vexations whilst working.⁴³⁷ Monastery farm work was also essential to survival during the unsettled times he lived through; and although times have changed, physical work is still regarded important as a symbol not only of spiritual cultivation but of resistance to secularisation. In conversation with me in 2016, the Abbot of Yunmen expressed his concerns that, ‘although China’s fast economic growth has enhanced the quality of life of Buddhist monasteries, rapid urbanisation has also challenged the serenity of the monastery environment and affected the purity of our faith’.⁴³⁸ Laliberté, Nichols, and Guo and Shi, among others, have highlighted the newly emerging problems faced by Buddhism and monastics during ‘China’s reform-era obsession with economic development’,⁴³⁹ such as the commodification of Buddhist sites as well as the authenticity of religious identity and space.⁴⁴⁰ Nichols points out, ‘large tour groups (especially those led by megaphone-toting guides) destroy the quiet and contemplative atmosphere conducive to meditation, study, and most other forms of devotional and ritual practices’.⁴⁴¹ Likewise, Guo and Shi lament that ‘monks have forgotten the meaning

⁴³⁷ Ven. Daojian (accessed September 10, 2020).

⁴³⁸ Fieldnote recorded in the summer of 2016.

⁴³⁹ Nichols (2019, 103).

⁴⁴⁰ For example, Laliberté (2019, 26) points out that new problems have emerged as ‘religious tourism has become an important source of economic activities’.

⁴⁴¹ Nichols (2019, 115).

of Buddhism and that they focus on economic activities.’⁴⁴² In other words, preserving *nongchan* tradition and maintaining a simple lifestyle is, in part, a rejection of the harm done to Buddhism and its aims by the materialism and ostentatious affluence of modern China. As Nichols comments, monastics at least could play a role of ‘mak[ing] the space more or less conducive to Buddhist practice while at the same time accommodating tourists and supporting their institutions’.⁴⁴³ For my informants, mindfulness was attained during arduous physical labour, in which they strove to tame the mind through hardship and exhaustion: a polar opposite from secular workshops that sell mindfulness as relaxing the mind in a comfortable and care-free environment.

As Taiwan is a relatively small island, with agricultural land in short supply, Chung Tai has been forced to modernise the *nongchan* tradition. That is, its members hold *nong* to include not merely farming, but all kinds of chores, including medical provision, driving, designing webpages, car repair, architecture, tailoring, and cooking, among others. Thanks to this system, Chung Tai is effectively self-sufficient in a huge range of commodities ranging from ironwork to meditation cushions. As Ven. Wei-Chueh often told his disciples, ‘Chung Tai Chan Monastery takes care of every member, in illness, old age, and death, so you can focus on your practice here without any worries’. I have also heard the current abbot say in the weekly assembly that Chung Tai ‘offers the basic necessities for every monastic member, which may not be the best, but will be sufficient’. Chung Tai does not provide every monastic with a monthly stipend or give out petty cash, but does indeed offer its members whatever they need in their everyday lives, including meals, stationery, clothing, shoes, and so on. This ensures that no-one needs to keep money or hoard items in their private rooms.

When Chung Tai monastics need supplies, they go to the monastery storeroom and pick

⁴⁴² Guo and Shi (2009, 75).

⁴⁴³ Nichols (ibid., 116).

up whatever they need, signing the items out to themselves. This obviates any need to go shopping outside the monastery or to ask for donations from the laity. When a member needs money for transport or medical treatment outside the monastery, Chung Tai provides the necessary funds, and upon the member's returning, he/she is required to return only the amount that was not expended. This system helps monastic residents to live peacefully in the monastery without disruptions from or unnecessary entanglements with the outside world.

Yunmen follows the ritualised monastic job-rotation system, in which on 15 January and 15 July of each lunar year, each person with an administrative role is either confirmed in it or assigned a new one, based on the abbot's evaluation of his/her recent performance. Chung Tai, in contrast, operates a more complex organisation, and makes adjustments to it much more quickly and flexibly, to meet the needs of its much wider array of functions.⁴⁴⁴ Indeed, the very speed with which administrative change occurs there has been hailed as encouraging the contemplation of impermanence. That is, every Chung Tai monastic is mentally prepared for a change of administrative duties that could happen at any time, with just three days' warning.⁴⁴⁵ In some cases, the new role allocated to someone by the abbot will be completely new and unfamiliar. This is intended to expand people's horizons and challenge them to develop themselves through learning varied new tasks. Chung Tai's monastics are also trained to lead others, and to be led, as part of a self-consciously interdependent community. Interpersonal likes and dislikes can make this more difficult, as Ven. Jian-Tan of Chung Tai has noted.⁴⁴⁶ In short, it would appear that the fast job turnover practised in this institution is relevant to mind-cultivation, insofar as one's social position or work status in an organisation is conventionally

⁴⁴⁴ Chandler (2004, 180) points out that Foguangshan members in Taiwan are moved from their duty posts every three years.

⁴⁴⁵ Each monastic member's role is initially agreed by a supervisory team of the vice abbot and the vice abbess in the department of monastery affairs and then is formally announced by the abbot on the bulletin boards in each offices and dormitory areas and an electronic announcement is delivered via emails to all of its branches.

⁴⁴⁶ Ven. Jian-Tan (accessed September 10, 2020).

associated with self-identify, pride, and a sense of dignity,⁴⁴⁷ all of which attachments are – in this case – regularly broken off, enabling one to develop a selfless attitude and a sense of detachment.

A conversation between Ven. Wei-Chueh and a monk disciple resonates with the above idea of there being an association between mind-cultivation and work status:

A monastic disciple went to see Ven. Wei-Chueh and requested a duty change. He said: ‘Master! I really, really, really hope to change my work.’ The Master said: ‘There is nothing “real” in this world.’⁴⁴⁸

A similar idea is also found in the teaching of the third Chan Patriarch, Sengcan (496? - 606). The following passage from his *Xinxinming* (*Trust in Mind*) illustrates the connection between ‘an equal mind’ and one’s spiritual achievement.

The Supreme Way is difficult only for those who pick and choose. Simply let go of love and hate; The Way will fully reveal itself. The slightest distinction results in a difference as great as heaven and earth. For the Way to manifest, hold not on to likes and dislikes.⁴⁴⁹

4.1.4 Daily Buddhist lessons

My fieldwork data suggest that, in addition to following the communal routine and monastic regulations, each individual follows *dingke* or ‘regular Buddhist lessons’ to purify his/her mind during free time. One monk informant, who headed the reception office in Yunmen, stated that ‘mindfulness ensures that my every thought does not deviate from the Buddhist teaching.’ No matter how busy he was, it seemed important to him that he persist in his *dingke*, which he described as ‘a rope to hold onto’ to prevent himself becoming lost. In this section, I take an in-depth look at how two devout practitioners used their free time to practice mindfulness in different ways.

Ven. Wuxin, an elderly nun from the northwest of China, was one of the five nuns who actually resided in the male-dominated monastery during my fieldwork. Subsequently, she and

⁴⁴⁷ Fearon (1999).

⁴⁴⁸ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed November 3, 2019).

⁴⁴⁹ T48n2010.p376b20-377a10; translated by Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2009).

I often had chats in her humble but functional room. The low and calming sound of chanting of the Buddha's name came from her small radio, which was kept on all day. She told me that, after her son ran away to become a monk at age seventeen without her permission, she travelled hundreds of miles to Yunmen Monastery simply to bring him home again. However, she found the monastery's peaceful environment highly agreeable, which led her to stay on, and eventually become ordained. She kept piles of audiotapes of Mahāyāna sutras, covered by a cloth in a neat and tidy manner, as materials for her daily practice. She would chant the *Diamond Sutra* each morning at dawn before attending the morning session, and again during the day, while managing and cleaning the guest rooms. In her free time, she chanted and prostrated herself in her small room, and every night, she listened to around two hours of recorded dharma talks given by a famous Taiwanese preacher monk, Ven. Hui-Lü (b. 1953).⁴⁵⁰ This, she said, had been her unbroken pattern for the previous ten years. For her, mindfulness meant keeping a simple and plain lifestyle, dedicating oneself to work wholeheartedly, paying attention to one's thoughts, enduring hardship, and restraining one's temper.

I met Ven. Mingcan, a monk in his sixties serving in the Ven. Xuyun's memorial hall. He was very humble and greeted each visitor with a gentle smile. He offered me a cup of ginger tea and we began to talk. He said he had no idea why he had become a monk initially, but that, throughout the subsequent years, he had focused his mind on trying to do his job well. In his spare time, he cleaned the monks' living quarters, and removed cobwebs from the high ceilings of the meditation hall. He said that he treasured every opportunity to serve, and that his body was strong due to his many physical chores. His cleaning of the memorial hall began at 3 a.m., and at daily morning chanting, he stood for two hours with the other monks despite his aching legs. For him, Buddhist practice was all about training the mind, and mindfulness meant

⁴⁵⁰ He founded Wen Shu School in Kaohsiung, and his dharma talks are widely circulated through tapes and books and very popular in Mainland China and Taiwan. For more details, see Wen Shu School (accessed January 28, 2021).

removing any unwholesome thoughts, having a kind heart, observing the moral precepts, and not wasting time. By the end of our long chat, night had fallen, and he held out a lamp and walked behind me to illuminate my path. Having seen that I was safe back in my room, he disappeared into the dark at the end of the bamboo path.

4.2 Seminary study

Yunmen and Chung Tai both set up *foxueyuan* to provide systematic Buddhist educations to their members. This concept, which is relatively new,⁴⁵¹ differs from that of a Buddhist university, which offers accredited programs and is open to laypeople, insofar as the former is aimed strictly at developing monks and nuns capable of self-cultivation and adaptable to the needs of modern society when carrying out missionary work.⁴⁵²

In 1992, during a period of Buddhist revival that followed close on the heels of China's opening up to the outside world, Yunmen *foxueyuan* was founded by Ven. Foyuan. At the time of my fieldwork, it had about 150 student monks who had come from various monasteries, and who either planned to remain in Yunmen or to move on to other monasteries after graduation. Founded one year later, Chung Tai's *foxueyuan* only trains its own monastics, which has separate divisions for monks and nuns. Despite this fundamental difference in membership, both these Buddhist seminaries share some common values. First, their instructional staff are all senior monastics, not lay scholars. Secondly, both seminaries emphasise the integration of doctrinal studies into their daily practices, and regard a student's monastic conduct and morality as far more important than his/her sheer intellectual ability. And, for this reason, participation in physical chores at the monastery and helping out during various ceremonial events is considered an integral part of seminary education at both sites.

At Chung Tai's *foxueyuan*, Ven. Wei-Chueh proposed the *san-huan-yi-ti* (three links of

⁴⁵¹ Gildow (2016, 5).

⁴⁵² Travagnin (2020, 107-9).

cultivation), which is a framework that would facilitate his disciples' learning about how to live a monastic life. To achieve Buddhahood, the master explained, one must make efforts in the three areas of scriptural studies; merit-making; and the practice of meditation.⁴⁵³ This attempt to strike a balance between concentration and wisdom, and to blend merit-making and wisdom-seeking, was not entirely unique, however: being similar to what Ven. Foyuan emphasised regarding the linkage between study and practice, and the unity of farming and meditation practices.

The curriculum at Chung Tai's *foxueyuan* consists of two years of fundamental Buddhist training, followed by two years of advanced monastic education. Students who complete the fundamental phase must apply again to commence the advanced phase. The abbot normally grants administrative roles in the monastery or its branches to graduates, and also in many cases to students who drop out. The seminary curriculum includes *wutang gongke* and Buddhist subjects that include sutras and doctrinal studies, dharma musical instruments and chanting, as well as secular subjects such as foreign languages, calligraphy, computer science, and martial arts. In the following subsections, I draw on my own experience of being a nun student at Chung Tai's *foxueyuan* from 2002 to 2006.

4.2.1 Decluttering the mind

The importance of developing good habits in one's monastic life is generally stressed at Chung Tai's *foxueyuan*. Sharp, lucid observation of everyday life is regarded as transforming the mind from carelessness to carefulness, from impurity to purity, and from disturbance to calmness. Thus, students are constantly reminded to keep a high level of hygiene and tidiness in their day-to-day environments, and their rooms are randomly checked by faculty members to ensure that these institutional standards are being maintained.⁴⁵⁴ As Heirman and Torck have

⁴⁵³ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2016, 29).

⁴⁵⁴ For example, personal books should be well sorted. Clothes have to be hung properly, and underpants should be folded into a square and placed at a lower level to one's sight. Sanitary napkins should be wrapped

highlighted, the monastic outlook closely links internal virtues with outer cleanliness.⁴⁵⁵ Being scrupulous and mindful about one's living environment is important to inner transformation, a process in which hygiene – symbolic of purity – is also an essential element. Ven. Wei-Chueh has stated that

if we are capable of performing finer details, our mind will become very observant and refined. The mind of ordinary people is very crude. A Bodhisattva's mind is much finer, and the Buddha's mind is the most refined. How can we change our mind from a crude phase to a more refined one? It requires constant observation in our daily life and through the rules refraining from, and practice to still and train the mind. Gradually, the mind will become concentrated, pure, and settled, and one will eventually see the true nature.⁴⁵⁶

In other words, carefulness not only supports one's mindfulness, but also protects one's mind from neglect and ignorance, and guards others' minds and practices against unnecessary disturbance and distraction. As stated in the *Dhammapada*, 'one who can protect one's speech, restrain one's thoughts, and uphold one's action, without disturbing or annoying sentient beings, is a practitioner capable of benefiting others.'⁴⁵⁷

4.2.2 Moving and moving again

Seminary students at Chung Tai are required to change rooms every term. They cannot choose when or where to go, and are given only a very limited time to pack, which forces them to focus closely on the task at hand. As well as being useful practical preparation for their future monastic careers, in which moves from job to job and place to place will be commonplace, each such move forces them to reflect upon their attachment to external things, and to detach themselves from their spaces and all the possessions they have accumulated. This tends to make them more cautious about acquiring items subsequently. Cleaning one's living space, meanwhile, has the wider aim of removing all distractions that could obstruct one's practice.

carefully after use so that next users do not see any blood.

⁴⁵⁵ Heirman and Torck (2012).

⁴⁵⁶ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed May 1, 2020).

⁴⁵⁷ T04n211.p589a2-3.

4.2.3 Meditation practice

Seminarians' meditation practice is stressed as key to uprooting their affliction and reaching enlightenment. In their weekly meditation lessons, they must familiarise themselves with a range of ancient meditative techniques: the *smṛtyupasthāna* (mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and dharma); contemplation on compassion; contemplation on causes and conditions; contemplation on impurity; and breathing methods. Each is taught by senior monastic teachers. In class, students are sometimes called up to the stage to lead the sequence of practising a specific contemplation method; and outside of class, they have to record how they engaged with a contemplative method in their private time, e.g., by making daily records of how they practised it over the course of a month. Such records must include detailed descriptions not only of the frequency and length of practice, but also of how it operated differently when the student was sweeping floors, washing clothes, chopping vegetables, and so on.

Some students post pictures of the human skeleton on the walls of their rooms as an aid to their contemplation of the impurities of the body, with the wider aim of developing detachment. As Kung has explained, the 'ugliness' of a meditation subject helps one to develop 'a sense of detachment from the body and [to] discard desire for the body, both of oneself and of others.'⁴⁵⁸ Contemplating a graphic depiction of a living human body turning into bones reminds them that the physical differences between men and women will eventually cease to be relevant, and realising this helps them to overcome their romantic attachment to the physical body of the opposite sex. Some students would also write a large Chinese character *si* (death) at the head of their beds as a reminder of impermanence, motivating them to live in the moment, make effective use of the time they have, and practice even harder. In addition, it is a long-standing institutional tradition for all seminarians to meditate between 10.30 and 11.30 a.m.,

⁴⁵⁸ Kuan (2008, 54).

the so-called ‘golden time of day’. During that hour, one can see hundreds of students sitting in the large meditation hall and practising various kinds of meditative methods they have learned in class, having been taught that through years of persistent practice, they can discover the power of tranquillity.

4.2.4 Self-reflective diary-writing

One of the most important elements in the curriculum of Chung Tai Buddhist Institute is self-reflection. Students write a self-reflective journal every night before going to sleep, and have to submit it to their tutor the next morning, even during the busiest ceremonial period of the year. As Buswell reminds us, monastics are ordinary people who have their weaknesses and worries.⁴⁵⁹ This practice is designed to train them to recognise their shortcomings, especially their delusions and attachments, and to seek to refine their minds in a spirit of diligence.

The following excerpt from a self-reflective diary was written by a nun living in Chung Tai.

One morning, I swept the fallen leaves in the Bodhi Park. As there were so many leaves, in my rush to finish the work on time, I sometimes hurt insects accidentally. Later, another monastic member kindly taught me to be mindful on my actions and to focus my mind on the speed and power with which I swept [...]. After practising for two months, the level of my awareness gradually improved, and my sweeping movement became gentler, so that I could stop my broom before it hurt insects. In daily life, reflecting upon oneself in any kind of situation is a process of cultivation.⁴⁶⁰

As this example shows, cleaning a space in the outside world is widely considered a good way to clean inside one’s own heart. This might suggest that building self-awareness through mindfulness practices requires the courage to see one’s weaknesses and make changes.

4.3 Interpersonal relationships

Buddhism comprises a system that engages fundamentally with two kinds of

⁴⁵⁹ Buswell (1992, 17).

⁴⁶⁰ Ven. Jian-Que (accessed September 10, 2020).

relationships: monastic members within their community peer relations, and the relations with the laity outside it.⁴⁶¹ The extent to which a Buddhist monastic community, or Buddhism in general, can fulfil its religious and social missions depends on both groups playing their distinctive and irreplaceable roles in a cooperative and harmonious manner. The complexity of these interrelationships frequently involves both opportunities for engaging with the principle of mindfulness, and challenges to doing so.

4.3.1 Monastic peer relationship

Both Chung Tai and Yunmen are highly appreciative of the value of living in their large well-disciplined monasteries, and reject the idea of living any other sort of environment, even small temples.⁴⁶² This is based on the view that the collective disciplinary power fostered in a large monastery environment and peer-monitoring function can effectively prevent any lapses in their monastic discipline. More specifically, the socially constructed aspects of such contexts are seen to have both overt and covert influences that can promote their members' faith and their ability to restrain themselves from any acts regarded to be 'unwholesome'. Another perceived benefit of a communal lifestyle is that individuals' talents and efforts can be brought together to contribute to the monastic community and further enhance the collective mission of disseminating Buddhism rather than relying on individuals' talents and efforts in isolation, which implies that the power of the collective is much more effective than the sum of its individual parts.

Communal life in a monastery can be seen as akin to living in a big joint family and monastics share food, accommodation and the money donated by laypeople as key resources for building harmonious communal relations. They also share similar spiritual aspiration and daily practices with others who also choose to renounce the secular lifestyle. Thus the

⁴⁶¹ Gethin (1998: 85) highlights that from the beginning, Buddhism has been composed of two types of people: 'lay supporters' and 'homeless wanderers'.

⁴⁶² Yunmen Monastery (2007, 137) and (2012a, 184).

monastery environment provides a powerful sense of ‘togetherness’ and belonging in which mutual help comes to replace the sense of isolation initially felt by those who have renounced the secular world and eventually strengthens their confidence on their chosen religious path.

Yu likens nuns’ lives to student life at college, suggesting that Taiwanese nuns ‘possess their own freedom as single women’ in a ‘mutually-supportive community’.⁴⁶³ Her observations resonate with my own experience in which I found the support I received from my monastic peers especially at the inception of my monastic career gave me a strong sense of belonging. Each time I had thoughts of giving up the renunciant path, some nuns would spend long hours talking with me, and others sent me small cards or wrote poems of encouragement and posted them on my door. The positive influence of such strong peer support has the potential to help one overcome negative thoughts and emotions when confronting a range of difficulties.

Despite the flourishing of Buddhism in Taiwan since the 1980s, and the country’s growing population of highly educated nuns, women who become nuns are still seen in a negative light and ‘othered’ by the society, as noted by Chern.⁴⁶⁴ It further complicates the matter as Chinese monastics are normally told not to reveal the hardship of their renunciant life to people in the outside world, even to their own families. They are obligated to retain a very limited level of contact with lay followers or friends and family as part of the institutional requirements. For example, in the case of Chung Tai, monastic members are not even allowed to own a private mobile phone or have a personal social media account. Neither do they read newspaper nor watch TV programmes in general. Their knowledge of what is happening around the world is updated from the selected news provided by the monastery. Thus, for those who become monks or nuns, monastic peers are often the only people available to chat with

⁴⁶³ Yu (2000, xviii; xix).

⁴⁶⁴ Chern (2002, 300-1). Based on personal observations, I would argue that Chern’s argument is applicable to monastics in general in Taiwan, and not only females.

and share feelings and ideas.

However, getting along with one's peers in a monastic community is quite different from making friends in the outside world. For example, although gift-giving is a common practice in Chinese society, there is a widespread view that, as renunciants, monastics do not need to engage in material exchange to deepen their relationships. Giving gifts is also seen as running counter to the principle of equal sharing, and can also lead to attachment in small circles. Instead, discussing ideas about Buddhism is the preferred form of exchange.⁴⁶⁵

Each monastic member is expected to maintain an independent mentality and avoid any emotional attachments whilst complying the communal lifestyle and schedule. The distinct character in human relationship in the context of a monastic community is reflected in the passage of *Dīrghâgama*, which highlights that monastics should follow two things: cultivating meditation in silence and discussing about the dharma.⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, as *Yongjia Zhengdaoge* (*Song of Enlightenment*) puts it, the enlightened one 'walks always by himself, goes about always by himself; Every perfect one saunters along one and the same passage of Nirvana.'⁴⁶⁷ In a monastery setting, a peer relationship is founded on a religious bond formed on the understanding of the dharma and a shared religious vow, rather than on an emotional one. It is therefore held to be important to reach a 'middle way' in any relationships, which should be compassionate but not emotional. Students are taught to avoid any physical contact in the monastery, even with others of the same sex. They are not, for example, allowed to help each other with head-shaving, which is conducted on a weekly basis. It is also strictly forbidden to *chuangliao* (intrude into someone else's room). If two nuns are seen to have become very close, they are warned by their superiors to separate immediately. In this way, the interpersonal

⁴⁶⁵ Taking any material item belonging to the monastery for private use is also considered immoral. When I interviewed a monk who worked in the reception office at Yunmen, he told me that utilising monastery resources for soliciting favours or any secret dealing was against the practice of mindfulness.

⁴⁶⁶ T01n0001.p114b18-23.

⁴⁶⁷ *Yongjia Zhengdaoge* (T48n2014.p395c25). Translated by Suzuki (1956, 91).

interaction becomes another lesson in training oneself in mindfulness.

For monastics, the main link between gender relations and the practice of mindfulness is the avoidance of mutual sexual attraction, and of sexuality more generally. An underlying reason that sexuality and affective attachments are regarded as fundamental causes of suffering. In Mainland China, it is customary for monks and nuns to live separately in single-sex communities, and this physical distancing is deemed essential to maintaining celibacy. In Taiwan, on the other hand, as Cantwell and Kawanami have pointed out, monasteries are ‘relatively egalitarian’, and ‘monks and nuns live and work together on the same premises.’⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, Chiu has suggested that this ‘dual *samgha*’ is ‘a key feature of Taiwanese Buddhism’.⁴⁶⁹ To some extents, a mixed-sex monastery is still a controversial innovation and scholars hold diverse views of this phenomenon. On the one hand, a dual *samgha* community can provide a powerful team for conducting larger-scale dharma functions and exert wider social influence, but on the other, having both sexes living together inevitably poses challenges to some who have opted for a celibate life.

In practical terms, Chung Tai monks and nuns live in separate quarters, and clear physical distance is maintained. When they meet outside, nuns usually put their palms together to express respect to the monks, without making eye contact. Monks put their palms together to respond. This silent interaction between monastics of the opposite sex is commonly practised to convey warm greetings while maintaining the physical distance that convention requires.⁴⁷⁰

The relationship between monks and nuns in a dual-*samgha* monastery tends to take the form of an alliance, working to achieve a shared spiritual mission; and this is especially

⁴⁶⁸ Cantwell and Kawanami in Woodhead et al, eds. (2016, 103).

⁴⁶⁹ Chiu (2016, 9). Chiu’s study offers a historical interpretation of the development of dual *samgha* communities in Taiwan, in which refugee monks arriving from Mainland China, despite receiving a cold welcome from the local population hosting them, received warm support from nuns and female lay practitioners there.

⁴⁷⁰ For the study of gender issues in contemporary Chinese Buddhism and the relationship between monks and nuns, see Chiu (2016).

evident during busy ceremonial periods. Ven. Wei-Chueh offered his monk and nun disciples the following guidelines as to when and how cross-sex interaction should occur.

No matter how a male practitioner sees a female practitioner, or a female practitioner sees a male practitioner, it is necessary to keep a distance and abide in mindfulness. Except for about the monastery's affairs or in disseminating Buddhism, the opposite sex should not talk or look at each other. Eyes should look inward and one should observe mind.⁴⁷¹

The teachings suggest that mindfulness is seen as important in efforts to eliminate sexual interest, as part of the wider programme of detaching oneself from emotional and physical desires.

As per the ancient tradition of the Eight Garudhammas, nuns in Chung Tai offer their respect and relate to the monks as their 'brothers'. They also learn to avoid the eighty-four flirtatious manners and tempting postures of women mentioned in the *Maha Prajapati Bhikkhuni Sutra*.⁴⁷² The feminine behaviours listed in the text, such as swaying the body while walking, or laughing without restraint, are considered reflections of inner female sexuality. Buddhist nuns are taught to act as neutral as possible in gender, in emulation of a *dazhangfu* (great man): 'decisive, calm, independent, compassionate, and fearless'.⁴⁷³ For outsiders, Therefore, the facts that monks and nuns regard each other as *shixiongdi* ('dharma brothers') rather than dharma brothers and sisters, and address each other similarly as *fashi* ('dharma master'), reflect efforts to neutralise gender in Buddhist monastic settings. In the monastic environment, patriarchal terms are regarded as normative in expressing their respect for seniority and monastic members do not see their relationship to one another in binary gender terms like in the secular world.

Interestingly, nuns I met in Chung Tai generally accepted these 'masculine' terms, and saw the female manners mentioned in the texts as lessons for their spiritual cultivation. Such

⁴⁷¹ Ven. Wei-Chueh (Accessed March 11, 2020).

⁴⁷² T24n1478.p954a06-955a3 and Yang (2015).

⁴⁷³ Tsomo (2019, 111).

insiders' views are echoed in Chiu's finding that nuns in both Mainland China and Taiwan tend to interpret the rules imposed on nuns as 'gender-specific' rather than as 'gender-discrimination'.⁴⁷⁴ As Sirimanne put it, 'the Dhamma that promotes the eradication of all negative attitudes and false views is genderless at its pristine and transformative core';⁴⁷⁵ so perhaps for these nuns, the notion of male or female is transitory.

Monks at Chung Tai are generally taught to be compassionate and humble towards both nuns and laypeople, but to remain cautious about women and maintain physical distance from them. For example, when serving tea to a monk, a nun or other female practitioner puts the teacup on the table instead of handing it directly to him, to avoid any contact between their hands. Moreover, the monks in a dual-*samgha* community are expected to serve as role models to the nuns there, which implies higher expectations regarding their moral conduct – and indeed, their other conduct. When things went wrong in ceremonies at Chung Tai, it was usually the monks who bore the blame and were reprimanded by Ven. Wei-Chueh. By contrast, when a nun made a mistake, she received a gentle exhortation and words of guidance only from senior nuns, and seldom from monks.

All year long, Chung Tai and Yunmen hold all kinds of *fahui* (Buddhist ceremonies),⁴⁷⁶ ranging from large to small, and no member can escape the intensive and frequent human interactions demanded during these *fahui*. These include *chanqi* (Chan retreats), *yufu* (Buddha-bathing), *qingming* (tomb sweeping), and *yulanpen* (Buddhist ghost festival),⁴⁷⁷ among others. During my stay at Chung Tai, I remember monks and nuns often staying up later than usual during the preparation of ceremonies, which were frequently held one after another, forcing them to finish their other work more quickly than usual.

⁴⁷⁴ Chiu (2016, 52).

⁴⁷⁵ Sirimanne (2016, 285).

⁴⁷⁶ *Fahui* (dharma assemblies) refers to a Buddhist ceremony and is also interpreted as 'an encounter with dharma'. On this occasion, monastics and laity gather together for a shared religious goal.

⁴⁷⁷ The festival is based on the *Yulanpen Jing*. For more details, see Karashima (2012) and Teiser (1996).

In Yunmen, I witnessed the hectic preparational process on the eve of the 10th memorial ceremony of Ven. Foyuan. Monastic members appeared to be struggling with the enormous workload conducted under a traditional monastic organisational structure despite the support and joint efforts of many temporary volunteers from the local areas. The event highlighted the difficulty in accommodating the need for a large-scale modern *fahui* under the prevailing mode of division of labour and operation, which was arguably outdated.⁴⁷⁸ These collective and communal exercises not only stretch an institution's human resources to their limits but also a challenge to their mental and physical capacities given their already full daily schedules of tasks.

Chung Tai, in contrast, is experienced in conducting ceremonies based on meticulous planning, and each ceremony is administered from an event-specific command centre, staffed by groups of monastics and lay volunteers. The large-scale Buddhist ceremonies at Chung Tai were usually attended by thousands of people, sometimes more than 10,000; and every monastic resident had to take turns working in different jobs, including alongside people they did not like. Ven. Wei-Chueh was well known for deliberately orchestrating interpersonally difficult situations so that problems on the ground would intensify, leading *fahui* to be more challenging for everyone. Sometimes, *fahui* became almost like a battlefield as members working under immense pressure acted out their personal frustrations. Conceivably, in his eyes, the success of a ceremony was not defined by its good outcome, but by its educational value for his disciples. On one occasion he said, 'in the years to come, my disciples will all look very much like perfectly rounded pebbles in this rushing creek',⁴⁷⁹ revealing his hope that monastic members would hone each one through their personal interactions, let go of their attachments, and ultimately, improve themselves.

⁴⁷⁸ For example, I observed that the monks relied on limited number of computers to process their work.

⁴⁷⁹ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2004, 29).

4.3.2 The relation with laity

As Jansen argues, presenting the laity as ‘merely existing to serve the monkhood is to deny the complex interactions’ that take place between them.⁴⁸⁰ The monastic-laity relations are indeed intricate and multi-layered. So here, I will discuss three aspects of how mindfulness is implemented by monastics in relation to lay people and explore their relationships in terms of interdependence, setting boundaries, and challenging social norms.

Writing of the interdependence relationship between these two groups, Kawanami highlights the role of monastics as a ‘merit-field’, as well as willing and trustworthy recipients of donations, thus making the giving of lay donors meaningful.⁴⁸¹ This dynamic allows the idea of generosity to be appreciated by both the monks and the laity. The latter support the former mainly through material giving of numerous types of daily necessities, and in return, monastics support the laity through spiritual giving, in the form of sharing the wisdom of dharma. A verse chanted in a Chinese Buddhist offering ceremony for the purpose of merit-dedication seems to confirm a prevailing sense of equality between the giving of material goods and the giving of the dharma. It reads: ‘The offering of either money or dharma has no difference; both complete and perfect the *dana* paramita’.⁴⁸²

As well as being a merit-making opportunity for laity, the offering occasion is a chance for monastics to show that they have absorbed an important lesson of how to receive a gift in a correct manner. In Chung Tai, monastics are taught to avoid greed and attachment in such situations by ‘giving onward’ to the whole monastic community, based on the principle of *lihe tongjun* (sharing benefits harmoniously), as described in the *Liuhejing* (*Six Harmonious Dharmas*).⁴⁸³ In my own experience, just one month after I was ordained as a novice, my

⁴⁸⁰ Jansen (2018, 117).

⁴⁸¹ Kawanami (2020).

⁴⁸² *Pini Riyong Lu* (the collection of daily *vinaya* X60n1114.p0147c16-17), compiled by Ven. Xingqi (1569-1636) in the Ming dynasty.

⁴⁸³ The passage can be found in both *Dachengyizhang* (T44n1851.p712c26) and *Zutingshiyuan* (X64n1261.p0379b21). *Zutingshiyuan*, compiled by Shanqing (1088-1108), is the earliest dictionary on

mother unexpectedly sent me a huge box of snacks. To my surprise, my senior mentor instructed me to open the box to see what was inside and then made me donate all the food items to the monastery to be shared equally among everyone. Even at that early experience, I recognised a key purpose of her guidance: that there was no such thing as ‘mine’ or ‘my own’, and everything in the community had to be shared as communal property, *changzhuwu*.

Moreover, during official ceremonies in Chung Tai, all monastics receive individual donors’ offerings, but this is viewed as merely symbolic, and most or all of the red envelopes in question are placed in bags for redistribution to Chung Tai’s foundations. My data resonates with Kawanami’s observations of Myanmar: that, in a traditional Buddhist society, the act of making an offering accentuates the value of the collective.⁴⁸⁴ In other words, offerings made by a group of lay donors to a group of monastics are seen as ultimately offered to the latter’s monastery, rather than to the individuals. Senior monastics at Chung Tai stressed that its members should not *huayuan* (ask for donations) from any individual layperson for their own needs, and especially avoid requesting expensive items such as luxurious scarves or bags. Yunmen seemed to be much more lenient in this respect; very often, a monk or nun there will have specific supporters who try to meet his or her material needs. Thus, in such an environment, the question of how to retain a sense of simplicity and prevent one’s greed from growing become an issue for every individual monastic.

Obtaining support from the laity is crucial not only to maintain the monastery’s economy, but also to fulfil its religious mission. Donors routinely offer food or clothing to monastics, but some rich ones even offer property such as land and houses to monasteries for the purpose of dharma dissemination. In the case of Chung Tai, it is these property donations that have allowed Chung Tai’s branches to spread across Taiwan and beyond. A mutual

Chan Buddhism in China. It is a collection of more than 2,400 entries comprising writings and records of Chan masters, such as Yunmen Wenyan (864-949).

⁴⁸⁴ Kawanami (2020, 4).

relationship fundamentally grounded in the perception of merit-making and the offering of *dana* continues to exist, but has developed beyond individual spirituality into a wider network of faith-propagation on both the domestic and global stages.

Kawanami has also pointed out the phenomenon of competition that exist between prominent lay donors.⁴⁸⁵ When monastic-layperson relationships are not merely one-to-one, it becomes far more challenging for monastics to deal with and lead multiple donors who might share similar levels of religious devotion but who disagree with one another about courses of action. Further complexity is added by the question of how to accord equal treatment to supporters who are rich vs. poor, which challenges a monastic's cultivation of compassion and wisdom.

Monastics, despite having renounced the mundane world, can repay the kindness of the laity in various ways. One of these is to support their practice of mindfulness in the secular world through preaching, with the wider aim of helping them regain energy and find wisdom to face their troubles, whether relating to their jobs, marriages, children, health, and so on. One devoted female lay supporter often came to the local meditation centre and would talk to me for hours about her husband's business and her problems as a wife and mother. As she did so, I would contemplate how to link all the doctrine I had learned in the seminary with her family crises, not simply to cheer her up but to identify potential tactical solutions to her problems that were compatible with Buddhism. For her, the meditation centre had become a haven in which she could rest her troubled mind and obtain good advice. Such alliances could be seen as reflecting the real-world value of retaining the spirit of mindfulness in times of distress.

On the other hand, Jansen emphasises that part of the *vinaya* rule system, as well as various institution-specific communal regulations, highlight the need to establish clear boundaries for the relationships between monastics and laity. As he explains, 'developing a

⁴⁸⁵ Kawanami (2020, 119).

separate identity from laypeople was essential for the continuation of the *Samgha* as a distinct entity. The monastic guidelines can be read as expressions of this identity.’⁴⁸⁶ The rules designed chiefly to keep monastics distinguishable from laity are extensive: covering physical appearance, bodily postures, verbal expressions, and behaviour. Indeed, seminarians are often reminded of the importance of ‘not acting like laity’, to avoid *jixian* (contempt and criticism) from outsiders.

The lay characteristics are described to symbolise negative features such as bondage and impurity, or are presented as the cause of cycles of rebirth in some texts. As the *Madhyamāgama* states, ‘family life is narrow and an accumulation of all kinds of defilements and afflictions; the monastic life is wide and cosmopolitan for its pursuit of the Way.’⁴⁸⁷ For monastics, engaging in mindfulness embodies – at least in part – their separation from the patterns of their own past lay lives in the secular world, via constant monitoring and comparison of their current vs. former speech, behaviours, and way of thinking.

However, it should be borne in mind that the distance monastics are expected to maintain from their lay followers is also physical. For example, Ven. Foyuan is recorded as having warned a good-looking young monk, ‘Watch out for girls. They keep staring at you and you do not know it!’⁴⁸⁸ This could be seen as implying that physical boundaries must be maintained to prevent emotional boundaries being breached. I would argue that negotiating between the seemingly opposed needs to foster monastic-laity partnership and interdependence, and on the other, to maintain a strict boundary between these two groups, relies heavily on self-awareness and self-reflection, in which mindfulness plays a key part.

Gethin insightfully points out that a monastic life is not only ‘an invitation to give up the household life and join the Buddha’s group of monks, but also an invitation to the wider

⁴⁸⁶ Jansen (2018, 117).

⁴⁸⁷ T01n0026.p733a18-19.

⁴⁸⁸ Yunmen Monastery 2012a:98. The master’s words were aimed at warning his male disciple that young females can be dangerous temptresses and a distance should be kept from them.

community to support the religious life'.⁴⁸⁹ That is, rather than cutting off connections with the world, monastic training is more about creating 'an alternative set of norms' for interacting with people. One of the classic examples of this is monastic engagement in death rituals. As Ernest notes, the fear of death 'haunts the human animal like nothing else', and religion can be seen as an attempt to bridge the worlds of the living and the dead.⁴⁹⁰ However, if they are to serve as interlocutors between these two worlds, Buddhist monastics must learn to overcome the social norms of human relationships, which are rooted in the fact that one usually only encounters the deaths of one's relations and friends. In Chinese culture, seeing a stranger's funeral, even while simply passing by on the road, is regarded as a sign of unluckiness or impurity. But the Buddhist practice of *zhunian*, aimed at helping dying people to retain mindfulness, breaks this normative boundary in human relationships. Among Chung Tai monastics, one of the most common reasons for going out of the monastery premises is to attend a layperson's funeral. Regardless of whether this occurs in a mortuary or a laypersons' house, groups of monastics chant and circle around the coffin, delivering blessings to the deceased and embodying powers of healing and support to the bereaved.

An instructive example is provided by my own experience of dealing with a case of *zhunian*. One day while serving at a Chung Tai branch in Los Angeles, I received an unexpected request by telephone from a Chinese immigrant I did not know. She was hoping to find a Buddhist monastic who would come to her house to conduct *zhunian* for her husband, who had terminal liver cancer and was expected to die at any time. On the motorway, heading toward her house with another nun, I kept trying to subdue my anxious feelings, amounting almost to terror, of potentially facing a stranger's corpse. I did this by trying to imagine the dying man as a member of my own family, and making vows that he would go to the Pure Land after death

⁴⁸⁹ Gethin (1998, 86).

⁴⁹⁰ Berger (1969) cited in Moore and Williamson (2003, 5).

and that the family would find some comfort in its darkest days. He passed away five minutes before our arrival. Sitting by his bedside, I gave him a short dharma talk, and then my peer nun and I took turns leading everyone in the room in chanting Amita Buddha's names for eight consecutive hours. When the ritual was complete, I had a powerful feeling that peace had returned to the house. I argue that for monastic members, involving and participating in death or sickness of strangers is a practice which challenges social norms in human relationship and exemplifies a wider positive influence towards strangers. Concurrently, witnessing death or attending a funeral often becomes another driving force for cultivating mindfulness as these events remind them of impermanence of life and urge them to be more diligent in their monastic practices.

One day, a few months after I became a novice nun at Chung Tai, I encountered Ven. Wei-Chueh planting trees. He asked me if I was fitting into my new monastic life, and I responded that I was eager to have a peaceful life alone. At this, the master raised his voice and told me that this was *xiaosheng xintai* (the mindset of the 'small vehicle'), and that I should instead *fadayuan*, which literally means 'make great vows to rescue sentient beings'. The two focal monasteries in this study, like many other Buddhist organisations, have extended such an approach well beyond the sphere of religious rituals, and exemplified it various other aspects of their interactions with wider society. For example, Chung Tai has donated food vouchers to local disadvantaged families, patrol motorbikes to police stations, a mobile library van to the local library, and ambulances and mountain disaster relief equipment to the local fire department.⁴⁹¹ Similarly, Yunmen monks are socially engaged, visiting poor villages and donating rice to them before each Chinese New Year.⁴⁹² The concept underlying these charitable actions is that 'all men are my father and [...] all women are my mother', expressed

⁴⁹¹ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed February 15, 2021).

⁴⁹² Yunmen Monastery (accessed February 15, 2021).

in the *Fanwang jing*.⁴⁹³ Thus, they understand that everyone in the world becomes relevant to themselves, and the happiness of all people, even strangers, takes on an equal importance. In these situations, it seems that mindfulness is an important practice for monastic members to be aware and discard their egocentric mindset, linking it to the doctrine of ‘no self’.

4.3.3 Interaction with animals

Monks and nuns in Chinese Buddhism follow a strict vegetarian diet, in concordance with the high value they place on not doing harm to sentient beings. In the monastery environment, however, they are often faced with intrusions by various kinds of insects and other creatures, including snakes, but they are expected to be mindful and practice compassion towards them. If, in coming across them, they scream or exhibit strong annoyance, other monastics will tend to consider this evidence of a lack of compassion, or perhaps a temporary ‘loss of mindfulness’.

There is a saying that ‘if you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.’⁴⁹⁴ Due to the humidity in Taiwan, these insects are very common in monasteries, and encountering them is seen as an opportunity to test and cultivate one’s compassion. Killing any living thing is forbidden, so mosquito nets are distributed to prevent monastics being disturbed at night. However, many monks and nuns also develop the skill of catching a mosquito in a container to take it outdoors, a practice falling under the general rubric of *fangsheng* (releasing insects). Some, however, do not drive away mosquitoes, and even send out the Three Refuges to them while they are resting on their skin and sucking their blood. Such practitioners see such moments as opportunities to perform the charitable act of donating blood/food. Occasionally, snakes that enter monastery sleeping quarters are caught and released back into nature by those brave enough to attempt this. How they treat annoying or

⁴⁹³ T24n1484.p1006b09-10.

⁴⁹⁴ Dalai Lama (accessed January 27, 2020).

dangerous animals in modern time is echoed in ancient *viyana* rules. As Heirman highlights, the disciplinary guidelines in most *Vinaya* traditions ‘prioritize care to reduce the risk of causing harm to these creatures [dangerous or annoying animals]’.⁴⁹⁵ Inevitably, however, each person has their own set of fears and anxieties about rats, snakes, or even cockroaches, and facing these creatures can serve as a reminder of how far he/she is from the ideal of compassion.

In this chapter, we have seen that mindfulness practices in the context of the two focal monasteries are multi-faceted and multi-layered, and are held to coexist closely with an array of Buddhist virtues, including but not limited to celibacy, diligence, compassion, self-discipline, clarity, gratitude, and harmony. This can help to explain why each of my informants gave me a different answer to my questions about what mindfulness is. Even so, one wonders if these apparently contradictory responses did, in fact, conflict with each other, or if they simply represented the same process of Buddhist cultivation from different angles. It seems to me that, in both monasteries, mindfulness was deeply interwoven into the members’ ongoing efforts to restrain their minds and bodies from unwholesome qualities, and to discover inner virtues.

⁴⁹⁵ Heirman (2019, 15).

Chapter 5 *Chanqi*: Meditation for awakening the mind

In the previous chapter, I examined the dynamics of daily monastic life outside the meditation hall or *chantang*.⁴⁹⁶ This chapter focuses on the intensive meditation practices inside that space, and how *zhengnian* is engaged on the path towards spiritual awakening. Often described as the school of meditation,⁴⁹⁷ Chan Buddhism emphasises meditation as a central means of attaining spiritual enlightenment and *chantang* (a meditation hall) occupies the heart of any Chan monastery. However, Ven. Wei-Chueh stressed that Chan practices outside and inside the meditation hall are mutually supportive. That is, if one lacks the basic grounding in mindfulness provided by day-to-day monastic practices, one might easily become frustrated and succumb to distractions or physical discomfort during long hours of meditation.⁴⁹⁸

Meditation is such a broadly defined and widely applied practice in many religious traditions. Nevertheless, the traditional Chan style of meditation retreat, known as *chanqi*, remains distinctive. This is because its ultimate goal is *ming-xin-jian-xing*, awakening one's Buddha nature,⁴⁹⁹ which contrasts with the goals of many other traditions and exercises, such as relaxing the body, reducing stress, achieving single-point concentration, promoting compassion or forgiveness, acquiring supernatural power, or seeking unification with the supreme being.

A prominent Chan master, Zongmi (780-841),⁵⁰⁰ categorised meditation (*dhyāna*) into five types in *Chanyuan Zhuquan Jidou Xu* (*The Preface to a Collection of Materials on the Origin of Chan*).⁵⁰¹ These were *waidao chan*, non-Buddhist meditation; *fanfu chan*, Buddhist meditation in adherence to causality; *xiaosheng chan*, Hīnayāna Buddhist meditation focusing

⁴⁹⁶ The detailed explanation of *chantang* can be found in *Chanlin Xiangqi Jian* (B19n103.p33a17-34a5), which is seen as an Encyclopedia of the Chan Monastic System and is written by a Japanese monk Wuzhuo Daozhong (1653-1744).

⁴⁹⁷ Cole (2016, 12).

⁴⁹⁸ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 24, 2020).

⁴⁹⁹ Ven. Xuyun (2018, 3).

⁵⁰⁰ Zongmi was a patriarch for both Huayan school and Southern Chan Buddhism.

⁵⁰¹ *Chanyuan Zhuquan Jidou Xu* (T48n2015.p399b13-22) is compiled by Zongmi and its original 100 volumes are nonexistent and only the preface exists.

on the notion of non-self;⁵⁰² *dacheng chan*, Māhāyāna Buddhist meditation on the notion of gradual cultivation; and *rulai qingjing chan*, supreme-vehicle meditation that focuses on awakening one's intrinsic pure nature (also known as *zushi chan*, Patriarchal Chan). Whether or not Zongmi's framework promoted the supremacy of Chan meditation over other traditions remains a matter for debate, but his framework offers us a helpful entry point to comprehending the self-proclaimed meaning and purpose of meditative practices in Chan Buddhism.⁵⁰³

The character representing *wu*, the Chinese term for 'awakening', has two components. The left-hand one indicates the mind, and the right-hand one, the self or 'I'.



Figure 3 The Chinese character 'wu' is a combination of 'xin' (vertical form, the left part) and 'wu' (self, the right part).

As such, this character reveals a strong connection between awakening in the Chinese context and self-discovery. More specifically, as Ven. Wei-Chueh put it, *wu* is to realise *ben-xin-ben-xing* ('one's intrinsic mind and inherent nature'), and this is the Way.⁵⁰⁴ Similarly, Chang defined *wu* in Chan Buddhism as 'the direct experience of beholding, unfolding, or realizing the mind essence in its fullness'.⁵⁰⁵

The central importance of such realisation to one's true nature or Buddha nature is widely reflected in Chan discourse, including in this dissertation's two focal monasteries. It is often claimed in the *Platform Sutra* that fully awakening one's mind leads to Buddhahood, known as *jian-xing-cheng-fo* ('see one's nature and become a Buddha').⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰² I am aware that Zongmi's use of the term *Hīnayāna* (small vehicle) carries a pejorative meaning.

⁵⁰³ Yang suggests that Zongmi draws on the four categories in the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* to create the five categories on meditation (Yang 1999, 219-35).

⁵⁰⁴ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 18, 2020).

⁵⁰⁵ Chang (1957, 339).

⁵⁰⁶ T48n2008.p350c6-9.

Though awakening is not limited to occur during sitting meditation, yet sitting posture is often regarded as the most helpful one. As Ven. Wei-Chueh noted,

When walking, it is difficult to concentrate on contemplating the content of dharma. The standing posture is not easy to maintain for long without becoming tired; the lying posture makes it easy to become drowsy and fall asleep; the sitting posture is conducive to a sustained effort and makes it easy to enter into a deep state of equanimity.⁵⁰⁷

Each *changtang* (a meditation hall) is dedicated specifically to sitting meditation.⁵⁰⁸

Welch explained its function at the broadest level as follows: '[A]s long as man exists, he will feel the need for an immediate, intuitive answer to the question "What am I?" The meditation hall provided one way of seeking it'.⁵⁰⁹ Another traditional name of a *changtang* is *xuanfochang*,⁵¹⁰ literally 'the hall for selecting people who can become Buddhas', likening it to an examination hall for meditators who seek awakening or, indeed, who may have already reached it.⁵¹¹

Chanqi, an intensive, ritualised style of meditation retreat, has historically been one of the most distinctive core features of Chan Buddhism, and it continues to this day. It involves collective practice that follows a strict timetable and other rules, set by the host monastery and the leading master. *Chanqi* literally means 'Chan seven', and this number has two connotations. First, it refers to one's seventh consciousness (*manas*), known as the ego-consciousness,⁵¹² and thus indirectly points to *chanqi*'s goal of *zhuan-shi-cheng-zhi*: transforming the seventh consciousness into wisdom.⁵¹³ Secondly, the number seven denotes that each *chanqi* is framed

⁵⁰⁷ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 23, 2020).

⁵⁰⁸ See Appendix One: Photo 10.

⁵⁰⁹ Welch (1967, 88).

⁵¹⁰ For example, see *Jingde Chuandeng Lu* (T51n.2076, p310b20-25) or *Xinfuzhu* (X63n.1231, p102a22-23).

⁵¹¹ There are three meditation halls at Yunmen Monastery, two for monks and one for nuns. The architecture is similar, all following the structure of a traditional Chinese meditation hall, where a Buddha statue is placed at the centre and meditators sit alongside the walls. The old meditation hall is used daily, but the newly built hall at the seminary is for monk students and accommodates about 150 to 200 people. The meditation hall for nuns is located at the nunnery and is smaller in scale.

⁵¹² Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed April 18, 2020).

⁵¹³ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed August 23, 2020). In a wider sense, full awakening is seen as requiring a process of completely eradicating misperception and attachment to self, which hinder the awakening of one's true nature.

within a cycle of seven days. Conversely, however, the relative brevity of a *chanqi* effectively sets a deadline for achieving awakening, and thus creates an urgency that is thought to help participants focus their efforts and maintain their motivation.

5.1 An overview of *chanqi*

Although no historical evidence about how the *chanqi* tradition started in China has survived.⁵¹⁴ An early Chan discourse explicitly praised the function of setting a time limit for practice. Master Jiexian (1610-1672), a prestigious monk of the Linji School, stated that

to ensure achieving awakening without delay, it is important and necessary to set up the practice in seven days. [Thus,] not only the talented ones would develop more fighting spirit and ambition, but also the weak-willed and less intelligent ones would act in a more swift and decisive manner without worries[.]⁵¹⁵

This passage highlighted that already by the seventeenth century, such seven-day meditation mode differed fundamentally from everyday meditation exercises, due to its high intensiveness. During the Qing Dynasty, more than one *chanqi* was held at the palace of Emperor Yongzheng (r. 1722-1735) in the Forbidden City.⁵¹⁶ And, albeit sporadically, *chanqi* were also convened during China's Republican period, even in years marked by war and other forms of turbulence.⁵¹⁷

Welch called *chanqi* 'Meditation Week' and characterised it as 'the high point in the religious year of great meditation centres [...] during which the halls became terribly crowded and there was scarcely elbow room between the seated monks who covered the floor'.⁵¹⁸ Yet, Welch's writings about *chanqi* held in Mainland China during 1950s were not based on direct

⁵¹⁴ Ven. Xuyun suggested that the *chanqi* tradition began to flourish during the Song dynasty. See Ven. Xuyun (accessed August 23, 2019).

⁵¹⁵ Cited in *Chanmen Duanlian Shuo* (X63n1259.p776c6-9). *Chanmen Duanlian Shuo* was Master Jiexian's work on the methods of exercising the Chan practices.

⁵¹⁶ *Yuxuan Yulu* (*Discourse Records Selected by Emperor Yongzheng* X68n1319.p696a16-b17). It is compiled in 1733 and consists of 19 volumes.

⁵¹⁷ For example, Ven. Xuyun held *chanqi* in 1934 at a dilapidated Nanhua Si and gave dharma talks to meditators. See Ven. Jinghui (2016a, 115).

⁵¹⁸ Welch (1967, 77).

observation, let alone participation, but rather on the accounts of monks who fled to Taiwan or to Hong Kong after 1949. It is hoped that what follows in this chapter will help redress that absence. It is fair to say of the ethnographic study of *chanqi*, or indeed any other form of meditation, that participation is a key entry point, since outwardly the practice itself appears unstimulating: e.g., in this case, people just sitting in a crossed-legged position for a long period of time. Only through joining in can one hope to gain real insight into the battle that takes place within the self during a meditation retreat.⁵¹⁹

Li suggests that when Taiwan was under Japanese rule, intensive meditation retreats already existed. For example, during the Mid-Autumn Festival of 1914, the Lingquan Monastery in Keelung hosted an all-island meditation ceremony with more than 40 participants, lasting three weeks.⁵²⁰ Meanwhile, *foqi*, the Pure Land style of seven-day meditation practice, had already established itself on the island and was already held in 1950 by a famous lay teacher Li Bing-Nan (1891-1986) at Lingshan Si in Taichung, in central Taiwan.⁵²¹ However, according to Ven. Hsing-Yun, *chanqi* in 1970s Taiwan were little known and sparsely attended.⁵²² Since the early 1980s, Taiwan's population has exhibited a growing interest in spirituality. In part, this reflects the proliferation of groups dedicated to meditation.⁵²³ The timing of spiritual popularity not only coincided with the country's religious freedom resulting from the lifting of martial law, but also it overlapped with the period of significant growth of spirituality in the contemporary world.⁵²⁴ For example, Ven. Sheng-Yan (1931-2009), a Chan master and the founder of Dharma Drum, held his first *chanqi* at *Zhonghua fojiao wenhuaguan*

⁵¹⁹ One exception is in Zhao's (2016) book about contemporary *chanqi* at Gaomin Si, in which he provides a detailed description on its actual performance and introduces his personal experience of attending twelve cycles of *chanqi* in 2003.

⁵²⁰ Li (2006).

⁵²¹ Yu (accessed June 18, 2020).

⁵²² One of the earliest *chanqi* in Taiwan was held by Nan Huaijin (1918-2012), a lay Buddhist teacher, at Lingyun Temple, Taipei, Taiwan, in 1974. He was the student of the renowned lay Chan teacher Yuan Huanxian (1887-1966). See Nan Huaijin Culture Foundation (accessed June 20, 2020).

⁵²³ Li (ibid).

⁵²⁴ Vincett and Woodhead (2016) suggest spirituality has experienced a significant growth since the late 1980s.

(the Chinese Buddhist Culture Institute) in 1987. In the same year, Ven. Wei-Chueh also held his first *chanqi* in Lingquan Si.⁵²⁵ They are both key advocates of the *chanqi* tradition in Taiwan, inherited from the lineage of Ven. Xuyun's Patriarchal Chan. Eight years later, Ven. Wei-Chueh invited Ven. Benhuan to instruct Chung Tai monastics in how *chanqi* was performed in Mainland China. Since Ven. Benhuan had learned directly from Ven. Xuyun, this exchange arguably represented a symbolic transmission of *chanqi* tradition from China to Taiwan.

5.1.1 *Chanqi* at Chung Tai

Under the guidance of Ven. Wei-Chueh, *chanqi* became equally accessible to both monastics and laity in Chung Tai, though separate events would be held for each of these two groups. The Chung Tai monks and nuns participate twice per year, in the late spring and autumn, when there are relatively few other activities in the monastery. Each time, two to four cycles are normally run, and each person is allowed to enrol in as few or as many of these cycles as he/she wishes. Monastics serving at Chung Tai's branches in other parts of Taiwan and overseas also return to the head monastery to attend *chanqi*. Lay participants must have taken, at a minimum, a three-month meditation course at one of Chung Tai's branches before participating in its lay *chanqi*. In part because the attendees of these events include many teachers and university students, lay *chanqi* are usually held during the winter and summer holidays.

The hospitality offered by Chung Tai during its *chanqi* is well known. Despite these events being completely free of charge, three vegetarian meals are offered every day, in addition to numerous types of snacks such as freshly squeezed juice, vegetarian burgers, and cakes made by the monastery's staff and volunteers and offered during break times. After experiencing one of these retreats, some lay participants begin supporting further *chanqi* as volunteers. They are allocated to specific teams with monastic leaders, serving as guards, food-

⁵²⁵ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed October 15, 2019).

and tea-delivery persons, and cleaners. In exceptional cases, lay participants have been so strongly inspired by their experience of *chanqi* that they decide to renounce their mundane lives and become ordained.

5.1.2 *Chanqi* at Yunmen

At Yunmen, *chanqi* was revived by Ven. Xuyun during his reconstruction of the site between 1943 and 1953. During the Cultural Revolution, however, almost all religious activities there were halted, including *chanqi*. Ven. Foyuan recommenced the *chanqi* tradition after 1982, holding five cycles every winter, a tradition that continues to the present day. *Chanqi* at Yunmen are mainly for monastics, but occasionally, a few lay devotees are allowed to join them. Unlike in Taiwan, *chanqi* in Mainland China is normally a single-sex activity.⁵²⁶ Therefore, as a female researcher, my study of *chanqi* at Yunmen Monastery had to take place at their affiliated nunnery, Xiaoxitian. The nuns there followed the same procedures and traditions that prevailed at the main monastery, but on a smaller scale and with three cycles of every winter instead of five.

When I sought permission to attend Xiaoxitian's *chanqi* in the winter of 2017, its abbess was slightly dubious about accepting me as a participant, asking, 'Do you think that you could endure it?' Although I had already attended *chanqi* many times at Chung Tai, it would be my first time at a *chanqi* in Mainland China. I felt both excited and intimidated. When I arrived on the day, I had to fill out a form in their guest book with the details of my ordination and the name of my main preceptor. A nun holding a large set of keys led me up a very narrow staircase to the first floor where, from a small storage area behind the stairs, she produced a plastic bucket, along with a smaller vessel for washing my face. Next, we went to the top floor, where the lecture hall was located. At the back of it, there were hundreds of folded quilts stored in the

⁵²⁶ Zhao (2016, 377-78) highlights that Gaomin Si is one of the few temples in China where *chanqi* is attended by monks, nuns, and laity together.

walls, and she told me to pick up a set of bedding before showing me to my room. This was the entirety of Xiaoxitian's *chanqi* check-in process.

The room I stayed in was reserved for guest nuns, and there were already three in it. One was in her 50s and had been on pilgrimage to many sacred Buddhist sites, making a full prostration at every third step along the way. She said she slept on the road at night, and that sometimes, a layperson would help her carry her belongings in a cart. Another, in her 30s, was a practitioner of the Pure Land School, and said she concentrated on reciting the Buddha's name as her main method of prayer. This was her first time participating in a meditation retreat at Chan school, and she would later suffer considerable back pain during the long hours of meditation, as well as blisters on her feet from intensive walking meditation, among other physical problems. The third nun was in her 40s and had a great passion for *chanqi*, which she had attended at various Chan monasteries. Before the *chanqi* at Yunmen was finished, she had already booked train tickets to the next one, at Gaomin Si in Jiangsu Province.

Living conditions in the nunnery were somewhat difficult. During the 21 days of *chanqi*, it rained continuously, and the temperature dropped to as low as about 4 degrees. There were no central-heating or shower facilities, so the nuns carried water heated from the water dispenser into the toilets to wash; but the floor itself remained bitterly cold. Each set of toilets contained a bucket, which I initially thought was a place to put dirty clothes, but was actually for collecting urine. Each day, a nun on duty would carry the buckets to nunnery's vegetable farm to fertilise the soil. It was also freezing in the meditation hall, almost like a refrigerator, so everyone was provided with a large, thick meditation blanket – much like a duvet – that covered the entire body.

5.2 Zhuqi Heshang: The host master

Not every Chan monastery can hold *chanqi*, due to the many requirements that must be fulfilled. For instance, they will need a meditation space and accommodation facilities for the

meditators, as well as teams of volunteers to support the operation. The most challenging prerequisite, however, is to have a well-learned and experienced Chan master who can convene the retreat. This host monk's many roles include leading the retreat's opening and closing rituals, supervising the participants in the practice of Chan meditation, and assessing whether each participant has attained awakening. A good host monk is said to be capable of offering timely guidance to the participants regarding their mental obstacles, based simply on his observations of their meditative states. In this respect especially, it is said that the expertise of the host monk is a crucial determinant of the success of a *chanqi*.

5.2.1 *Kaishi*: Dharma talks

Chan masters regard the mind as crucial to *chanqi* participants in changing their lives, and more specifically, in solving the fundamental problem of suffering in their daily experiences. As such, *kaishi* – dharma talks – are arguably the most important component of a *chanqi*, as they not only shape the practitioners' collective vision and knowledge of Chan meditation, but also are a fundamental driving force of their meditation itself.

Conveying the concept of the mind in Chinese Buddhism is an ongoing challenge, given that it is held to be beyond the matrix of any single language, and in some ways simply indescribable. As Olendzki has suggested,

The English language is rich in many ways, particularly when explaining the features of the material world, but it is remarkably clumsy when it comes to articulating the nuanced terrain of inner experience. This is one of the reasons the current conversations about consciousness, meditation, and psychology in general can at times become rather confusing.⁵²⁷

Thus, the limitations of English translations of Chinese terms may constrain our understanding of the original concept of mind in the Chan School, much as they inevitably cause confusion about Hinduism's concept of the permanent self (*atman*) or immortal soul in

⁵²⁷ Olendzki (2010, 163).

Abrahamic religions.⁵²⁸

The term *xin* is a multi-faceted umbrella term often used to denote the mind in Chinese Buddhism.⁵²⁹ *Xin* also has various meanings and can be categorised into four kinds in the context of Māhayāna sutras: 1) *routuan xin* (physical heart), 2) *yuanlü xin* (eight consciousnesses), 3) *jiqi xin* (collectively arising mind/the eighth consciousness), and 4) *jianshi xin* (true mind). Accordingly, *xin* indicates either the true nature or deluded consciousness in various contexts.⁵³⁰ However, I found that a number of other terms from the Chinese Māhayāna sutras were used interchangeably with *xin* by Chan masters in both of my focal monasteries, including *xinxing* (heart-mind), *ben-lai-mian-mu* (the original true face), *zhenru* (trueness), *zixing* (self-nature), *fashen* (dharma body), etc. These masters also talk about the mind via metaphors drawn from the natural and human worlds, especially to contrast the features of the true mind against those of the deluded mind. For example, a ‘master-and-guest’ metaphor is used to depict the true mind as a hotel’s owner, and the delusions as its guests, insofar as the owner is always present but the guests come and go. Similarly, the ‘dust-and-space’ metaphor implies that defiled ignorance is like tiny particles floating around in the air, whereas the true mind – like the space they float in – is unmoving and unshakeable.⁵³¹ And the ‘sun-and-cloud’ metaphor presents the mind as akin to the sun, whose wisdom is revealed when the clouds of ignorance are blown away.⁵³² All these metaphorical approaches share the same root idea, that

⁵²⁸ Chan school does not consider mind and soul as synonymous due to the following reasons: First, the mind is intrinsic among all sentient beings, which contradicts the belief in Abrahamic religions, which believe immortal soul is only possessed by human beings; second, Chan Buddhism suggests that the mind is intrinsic and does not come from any divine being, which is different from the concept of Atman in Hinduism, where individual self is related to universal Brahman.

⁵²⁹ See Xu (accessed February 20, 2020). The term *Xin* in Chinese is a pictogram. In ancient Chinese, the letter looks like a person’s heart. For long, in ancient China, it was assumed that the emotional and intellectual faculty is within one’s heart and its original meaning is the physical heart. Later on, the character progressively became more stylised and lost its pictographic flavour. Now, it also means one’s emotional and intellectual faculty or one’s emotions and thoughts.

⁵³⁰ Ven. Ciyi (2011).

⁵³¹ The notions of master-and-guest and dust-and-space are usually traced back to Ven. Kaundinya’s report on his enlightenment experience in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (T19n0945.p109c2-14).

⁵³² The notion of sun-and-cloud is related to the Platform Sutra (T48n2008.p354b24-c2).

only when delusion is gone will the mind be fully revealed, and are commonly used in sermons in both monasteries as a pedagogical tool to help practitioners identify what to let go of and what to retain in their inner worlds.

While explaining how to recognise the mind, Ven. Wei-Chueh often pointed to one's *juexing* ('intrinsic awareness') that knows deluded thoughts come and go.⁵³³ Ven. Fu Yuan further stated that 'this awareness and knowing [*ling-zhi-ling-jue*] is your Mind itself',⁵³⁴ explaining:

When you look into your mind, you will notice that an awareness exists. Apart from the awareness, what else is in your mind? [...] The one which moves is *wangxiang* [deluded mind]. The one which does not move is the [true] mind. The one which is aware and knows is your [true] mind.⁵³⁵

Teschner has highlighted some key differences between 'mind' in the Māhayāna tradition and in Western psychology. Perhaps most importantly, the latter 'attempts to reduce the mind to brain and treat consciousness as a neurological state.'⁵³⁶ Conversely, 'mind' in the Chan tradition is seen as immaterial and formless, and thus synonymous with neither the physical brain nor the heart. Ven. Wei-Chueh offers an example of a modern heart transplant to explain why the mind is not the physical heart. He explains that one's heart may be exchanged, but its past memories cannot be transferred, as muscles and nerves are material and feature metabolism. Moreover, when justifying why the mind is not the brain, he suggests that brain's nervous tissues are constantly changing through the process of generation, elimination, and death. Thus, the brain is material, not the mind.⁵³⁷

A distinction between Māhayāna and Theravāda understandings of 'mind' has also been commented on by scholars. In explaining human cognition in the latter tradition, Gombrich

⁵³³ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed November 9, 2019).

⁵³⁴ Yunmen Monastery (2010a, 44).

⁵³⁵ Feng et al. (2016, 306).

⁵³⁶ Teschner (1981, 81).

⁵³⁷ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 30, 2020).

linked the English term ‘mind’ to one of the six faculties (*indriya*):⁵³⁸ the momentarily changing mental stream in which thoughts continuously arise and pass away. The mind in this view is also considered an ‘internal sense organ’, dependent upon ‘contact’ with sensory objects.⁵³⁹ Loy likewise highlighted the Theravāda view of all consciousness as ‘the result of conditions’, even to the point that it ‘does not arise without those conditions’.⁵⁴⁰ And for Karunadasa, ‘mind is a process without an enduring substance’.⁵⁴¹ In short, from a Theravāda perspective, ‘mind’ is conditional, transitory, and lacks a fixed nature.

In Chan monasteries, in contrast, ‘mind’ appears to be superordinate in both mental activities and external experiences. It is perceived as existing in its own right, neither ‘born’ nor ‘made’; and in essence, it is held to be both formless and unchanging.⁵⁴² The description of it in *Zongjing Lu* (*The Record of the Axiom Mirror*) as ‘neither increasing at the stage of sainthood nor decreasing among the ordinary’ suggests that all sentient beings have their own minds, which are equal in essence.⁵⁴³ The distinction between the Buddha and ordinary people is therefore not about *possession* of mind, but rather about the wholesomeness of its operation.⁵⁴⁴ From a functional standpoint, meanwhile, all mental and physical activities are seen in Chan Buddhist cosmology as emanating from the mind,⁵⁴⁵ which is further considered to be the origin not only of all dharma, but of all natural and social phenomena.⁵⁴⁶

Unsurprisingly, the diversity of these various notions of ‘mind’ in Buddhist traditions and Western psychology is reflected in differences of nuance when it comes to mindfulness-related meditative practices. In both the focal monasteries, however, mindfulness is

⁵³⁸ Gombrich (2009, 144).

⁵³⁹ Walpola et al. (2017, 140).

⁵⁴⁰ Loy (1982, 68).

⁵⁴¹ Karunadasa (2018, 63).

⁵⁴² The idea is in *the Awakening of Faith in the Māhayāna* (T32n1666). See also Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 30, 2020).

⁵⁴³ T48n2016.p468b8-9.

⁵⁴⁴ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 28, 2020).

⁵⁴⁵ The idea is in *the Awakening of Faith in the Māhayāna* (T32n1666).

⁵⁴⁶ Such an outlook is evident in both Ven. Foyuan’s and Ven. Wei-Chueh’s teaching. For example, see Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 24, 2020).

conceptually grounded in the Māhayāna doctrine of mind. According to Ven. Wei-Chueh, the Chinese character *nian* consists of two parts – the upper one being an adjective meaning ‘now’, and the lower, the noun for ‘mind’ – which, when combined, refer to the mind being present in the moment.⁵⁴⁷ *Zhengnian*, meanwhile, is defined as the extinguishment of *wangnian* (deluded and attached thoughts) and *zanian* (distracting thoughts) by Ven. We-Chueh.⁵⁴⁸ On this linguistic evidence, mindfulness in the context is closely associated with the full embodiment and realisation of the mind as the outcome of eradication of all unwholesome, deluded, attached states.

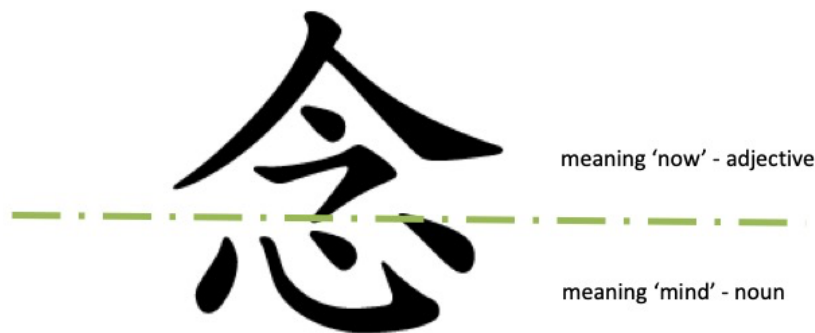


Figure 4 The Chinese character ‘nian’ is a combination of ‘jin’ (now, the upper part) and ‘xin’ (mind, the lower part).

According to Ven. Wei-Chueh, the highest form of mindfulness is *wunian*: the state in which the deluded mind has been tamed and the true mind becomes fully present. As he explained, Chan practices begin with the cultivation of wholesome thoughts, ‘and after that, [we] need to return to [the state of] *wunian* – that is, the mind not going or coming, not giving rise to any thoughts, having no forms or doing [...]. This is the place where you should settle down[.]’⁵⁴⁹ This passage seems to stress that *wunian* does not necessarily stand in opposition

⁵⁴⁷ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 22, 2020).

⁵⁴⁸ Ven. Wei-Chueh did not seem to explain the differences between *wangnian* (deluded and attached thoughts) and *zanian* (distracting thoughts) deliberately in his dharma talks.

⁵⁴⁹ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 22, 2020).

to the cultivation of wholesome thoughts; rather, it suggests that *wunian* is where one ends up after having wholesome thoughts, as even the most refined wholesome thoughts are still part of the flux of mental activity and thus transitory in nature. In other words, *wunian* constitutes a state of ‘absoluteness’ that not only extinguishes unwholesome states of mind but also goes beyond the clinging to ‘wholesome’ ones. Such a view was also espoused by the abbots of Yunmen and Liu-Rong in my interviews with them; and both also described *wunian* as the final goal of Chan Buddhism.⁵⁵⁰ Accordingly, the key importance of *chanqi* is that it can provide its participants with a direct path to attaining *wunian*.

5.2.2 *Kaogong*: Assessing *chanqi* participants

The highlight of the final day of a traditional *chanqi* is the *kaogong*. This ritualised oral examination seeks to establish whether each participant in the retreat has become awakened. It is supervised by the host master, who claps the examinee’s shoulder with a *xiangban* and asks a question such as:⁵⁵¹

‘What was your original face before you were born?’
‘Who is the one carrying this dead body?’
‘Who is the one chanting the *Amitabha*?’

Most participants do not reply to such questions and simply keep quiet. The exceptions are those who feel they have achieved an advanced level of meditation called *jingjie* and expect the host abbot to confirm it, since according to tradition, a practitioner who has discovered his/her intrinsic wisdom will be able to answer these seemingly illogical questions effortlessly.

In the *chanqi* held at Chung Tai, the *kaogong* has been replaced by a closing tea ceremony in which all participants are invited to drink tea and have snacks in the large hall. In Ven. Wei-Chueh’s time, he would say to them:

Seven days ago, you drank the tea. Now you are drinking the same tea. As the *Diamond Sutra* states, one’s mind should not abide in the past, in the present,

⁵⁵⁰ The interview with the abbot of Liurong Si took place on 2nd January 2018. He explicitly told me that *wunian* is the highest level of mindfulness.

⁵⁵¹ Usually, the abbot of the monastery holds the retreat and gives dharma talks to participants.

or in the future. May I ask you which mind is the one you are drinking the tea with?

Based on each person's answers, he decided whether he/she had become *kaiwu* ('awakened'). It was said that if one knew the right answer, one had tasted the flavour of awakening, which was the true meaning of *Zhaozhou* Tea;⁵⁵² but that if one did not understand the question, then the tea was just an ordinary green tea.

Crucially, the determination of whether *chanqi* participants are awakened must be certified by a Chan master who is himself awakened, and this is central to the host monk's role. This custom highlights not only how Chan masters took on the heavy responsibility of maintaining the tradition and guiding students in its practices, but also – more importantly – that they had to know and judge whether their successors could truly achieve the same experience of awakening as they themselves had done in the past.

5.3 Meditators

5.3.1 The procedure and rules of *chanqi*

Shou-she-liu-gen, literally means 'directing the six senses inwards from contacts with outside', is deemed necessary to waking a person up to his/her true nature. More specifically, the idea refers to withdraw the mind from six dusts: *sechen* (field of form), *shengchen* (field of sound), *xiangchen* (field of odor), *weichen* (gustatory field), *chuchen* (tactile field), and *fachen* (conceptual field). As such, it is related to a number of *chanqi* regulations aimed at allowing the participants to shut their sensory doors completely, pay full attention to themselves, and inwardly seek the places where their true natures reside. Indeed, the only thing they have to do is to follow the retreat schedule and take care of their inner thoughts.

When I attended a *chanqi* at Yunmen's nunnery, there was no orientation about its

⁵⁵² For the origin of *Zhaozhou* Tea, see Zhaozhou Heshang Yulu (J24nB137.p368c17-20 and J24nB137.p368c17-20).

procedures and I was not informed of the site's disciplinary rules, which – it subsequently emerged – were somewhat different from those I had been trained to follow in Taiwan. I was unfamiliar with the retreat's timetable, and did not know what messages were meant to be conveyed by particular dharma instruments. Nevertheless, my nun informants saw me as an 'insider' and expected me to 'know everything' about the retreat. Since they gave me no instruction, the only way I could learn was by making mistakes and being corrected with a *xiangban*. It was vital to attend each meditation session punctually, as lateness or absence could cause disruption to the whole group; violators were punished, and could even be expelled from the retreat. I myself was once a few minutes late because I did not understand the signal for gathering, and as a result, had to kneel in front of the Buddha statue in the centre of the meditation hall while the rest of the assembly sat in meditation. After that, I was more vigilant.

Chanqi participants are required to observe full silence⁵⁵³ and avoid any use of mobile phones, reading or writing. However, my observations suggested that monastic residents at both monasteries looked forward to attending these events, and saw the rule of keeping silence not as a challenge, but as a luxury. That is, a *chanqi* is a rewarding, quiet period in which one can settle down, rest and purify one's mind, and embark on a spiritual journey. Welch highlighted *chanqi* participants' strong intrinsic motivations, by way of explaining why some repeated the experience year after year. Many monastics at Chung Tai seemed to regard *chanqi* as a kind of holiday during which they could lay aside all duties. When the time came, these meditators would wear retreat badges so that no one would approach them for conversation.

In Welch's time, there were a number of variations in the schedules and degrees of discipline of *chanqi* conducted at monasteries in the first half of the 20th century in Mainland China.⁵⁵⁴ However, by 2018, according to my informants who had experienced *chanqi* at many

⁵⁵³ During my fieldwork, I observed that it is loosely practised in Yunmen's nunnery, unlike a strict observance of silence in Chung Tai.

⁵⁵⁴ Welch (1967, 77).

monasteries on the Mainland, this variety had become less marked. Yunmen follows *Yunju Yigui*, whose timetable consists of the ‘24 Sticks of Incense’, with its daily twelve cycles of walking and sitting that take place between 4 a.m. and 11 p.m.⁵⁵⁵ At Chung Tai, retreats’ schedules are modified and simplified to suit its large scale. Each day starts at 5 a.m. and ends at 10 p.m., and consists of ten sessions, each including 40 minutes of sitting, a ten-minute walking meditation, and ten minutes of rest.

5.3.2 *Xingxiang*: Walking meditation

Far from being aimless or carefree strolling, it is a practice aimed at concentrating on the mind during physical movement. Especially in the winter, it is regarded as a warm-up exercise in preparation for sitting meditation, to help the circulation and warm the body. Although the length of each walk varies as listed each retreat’s schedule, walking meditation usually consists of two parts in Mainland China. The first part is normal walking that proceeds from slow to fast. In the second, everyone stands on tiptoe, takes smaller steps, and bends their body downwards, with their heads touching their collars and hands lightly brushing the sides of their knees. This commences when the *weinuo* shouts an elongated ‘*Qi*’ (meaning ‘rise’ or ‘begin’). On hearing this, all participants imitate this long ‘*Qi*!’, while the *banshou shifu* (senior monastic teachers) also take turns shouting ‘*Qi*!’, after which everyone repeats it again. Finally, when the wooden fish is struck, all the participants in the hall immediately freeze, and the whole noisy room swiftly falls into silence. At that moment, all thoughts are to be put down, including the thought of walking, such that the body and mind return to a complete standstill, accompanied by a moment of self-reflection.

When I first attended a *chanqi* retreat in Mainland China, I was not used to their walking-meditation traditions, especially the shouting and running aspects, and this was very

⁵⁵⁵ *Yunju Yigui* is one of the few available guidebooks that provides the formalisation and the operation of the whole procedure of *chanqi* in Mainland China. It is compiled by Ven. Yicheng (1998), based on rules of Gaomin Si and Jinshan Si.

confusing and embarrassing for me. As I was striving to hold my breath without making any sound, the others were all making loud noises. After a few days, I noticed that my throat had become swollen, and I was coughing up dark-coloured sputum. Later, I came to realise that the act of ‘shouting’ was actually beneficial for participants, as a means of releasing mucus from their lungs. As Welch explains, the act of shouting is a signal ‘for the rank and file to rise up and struggle even harder against ignorance, error, and distraction, to grip their question [*huatou*] even more firmly’.⁵⁵⁶ In addition, the bent-over posture relieved the stress on my back muscles after long meditation; and once I started following Yunmen’s customary practice ‘correctly’, all my physical problems disappeared.

At Chung Tai, the method of walking meditation has been simplified from the traditional method, with the knee-bending as well as the shouting omitted. It nevertheless requires total concentration. When the body is in rapid motion, there is a tendency for the mind to wander, and thus, participants often miss the stop signal – stepping on or bumping each other – unless they have maintained a lucid mind. After they have all come to a stop, the host monk will occasionally ask the participants a question, for example: ‘At one moment, you were walking like the wind, and at the next, you were standing still. Is your mind that was walking and your mind in stillness the same one, or different?’ This crystallises the focus of this practice: realising one’s true nature, which neither comes nor goes between movement and stillness.

5.3.3 *Zuoxiang*: Sitting meditation

The sitting meditation in *chanqi* traditionally starts with a dramatic performative ritual in Mainland China. A *weinuo* (the monk/nun who directs the ritual) and *dangzhi jianxiang* (the *jianxiang* on duty), carrying their *xiangban*, enter the hall, walking fast. They circumambulate the Buddha statue before standing on yellow circles marked on the tiled floor in front of it. The

⁵⁵⁶ Welch (1967, 76).

weinuo then loudly announces the name of the session and urges everyone to shake their spirit while using her *xiangban* to hit the floor, and simultaneously, *dangzhi* strikes the board three times, and the bell once. These symbolic acts using instruments rather than words communicate the ritual sequence to the participants, and mark the beginning of sitting meditation. Every session starts with this performance, which implies that meditation is like a battle with one's inner enemies, and each meditator has to practise like a warrior, building the courage and skills to subdue his/her delusions. When the loud, rousing sounds announcing the sitting meditation gradually fade away, the lights in the hall are dimmed and the whole hall enters a state of motionlessness, and the duty *jianxiang* patrols the hall to ensure that the tips of everyone's shoes are aligned precisely with the borders of their benches.⁵⁵⁷

Ven. Ben-Huan has pointed out that the real purpose of the sitting meditation in *chanqi* is to subdue delusions, and that it would be useless if one did not work on one's mind.⁵⁵⁸ As the discourse of the *Platform Sutra* points out,

What is seated meditation [*zuochan* ...]? Externally, for the mind to refrain from activating thoughts with regard to all the good and bad realms is called 'seated' [*zuo*]. Internally, to see the motionlessness of the self-nature is called 'meditation' [*chan*].⁵⁵⁹

Sitting in the correct posture is seen as a powerful facilitator for achieving the realisation of the true mind, at least among practitioners who are yet to be awoken. Thus, sitting meditation is the core practice of *chanqi* and the majority of a given retreat's daily schedule is dedicated to it: normally, eight to ten hours. The meditators adjust their sitting positions first, then focus on adjusting their breathing, and finally, start working on their meditative method. This last requires that they overcome four common obstacles to their progress towards awakening. These are *wangxiang* (wandering thoughts), *hunchen* (dozing off), *wuliao* (boredom), and *wuji* (absent-mindedness or 'blankness'). To combat drowsiness, for example,

⁵⁵⁷ This is called *caoxie quanzi* (the straw sandals circuit).

⁵⁵⁸ See Ven. Benhuan (accessed October 17, 2019).

⁵⁵⁹ McRae (2000b, 45).

they are instructed to gently move their bodies or open their eyes to look at the incense burner at the front of the hall.

Like other traditional *chanqi* in Mainland China, the main meditation method that is taught at Yunmen is *can-huatou*.⁵⁶⁰ At Chung Tai, the meditators are normally instructed in three methods: *shuxi guan* (breath-counting), *can-huatou* (investigating ‘the origin of thoughts’), and *zhongdao shixiang guan* (the middle way reality method). *Shuxi guan* is meant to anchor one’s awareness to the counting of one’s breaths. Counting while both exhaling and inhaling is not recommendable as it is claimed to result in a bloated stomach.⁵⁶¹ Meditators follow their breathing rhythm and focus their mind on silently counting the number of breaths, from 1 to 10 through the course of exhalation and inhalation. It is explained that the method incorporates both traditional methods of Samatha and Vipassana. As Ven. Wei-Chueh explained, ‘When the mind counts the number with precision without mixing with other unrelated thoughts, that is Samatha. When the mind is lucid about the numbers being counted, that is Vipassana.’⁵⁶² The method has been described as an auxiliary means of preparing the mind to enter a deeper meditative state. Likewise, *chanqi* participants are exhorted to avoid three common breathing mistakes in the *Xiuxi Zhiguan Zuochan Fayao (Essentials of Practising Samatha and Vipassana Meditation)*.⁵⁶³ These are *fengxiang* (‘windy respiration’), *chuanxiang* (‘gasp for breath’), and *qixiang* (‘rough breathing’), all of which are claimed to disturb the calmness of the mind and thus hinder one’s progress in meditation.

According to Ven. Xuyun, the *can* in *can-huatou* means ‘to investigate’, while *huatou* refers to the ‘original state of mind before any single thought has arisen’. Batchelor suggests

⁵⁶⁰ In Yunmen, the choice of meditation methods is at people’s discretion.

⁵⁶¹ See Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed November 5, 2018).

⁵⁶² The breath counting method is one of *wu-ting-xin-guan*, the five main meditative methods instructed in the Tiantai school to stop the arising of five kinds of *fannao* (afflictions). See T46n1929.p733b11-14.

⁵⁶³ T46n1915.p466a1-15. It was written by Ven. Zhiyi, the founder of the Tiantai school. *Fengxiang* refers to meditation while breathing loudly, which can scatter the mind. *Chuanxiang* refers to meditation while breathing unsmoothly, which cause an imbalanced and broken breathing and jam the mind. *Qixiang* is meditation while the breathing is rough, which results in mental exhaustion.

that ‘the mind has a seemingly infinite capacity of chatter. And there is no instant or easy cure for this proliferation of thoughts and emotion.’⁵⁶⁴ From this perspective, *can-huatou* is arguably a revolutionary way to interact with one’s mind. That is, when conducting *can-huatou*, the participants do not *interact with* their thoughts, but instead must look straight into *where* one’s thoughts arise with full concentration and in a spirit of enquiry, which stops the mind from wandering. Ven. Foyuan described it using the following analogy:

Our deluded thoughts are like skinny monkey and wild horse [... To] subdue them, *huatou* is the ‘rope’. Holding the rope is to turn our attention, which is ordinarily directed to external things, back to oneself.⁵⁶⁵

In a similar vein, Ven. Wei-Chueh’s instructions for practising *can-huatou* in *chanqi* mention what participants may encounter during the sitting meditation:

[When] the mind stops grasping outwardly and begins to look inward [...] we find out that our mind is like camera films [...] all good or bad in this life manifest. Do not cling to these phenomena, but know that they are illusory and unreal. They are just the accumulated karmic seeds stored in our consciousness. Once these ‘seeds’ are completely cleansed, [what is achieved] is the true face of the mind. *Can-huatou* is a self-transformation from defiled consciousness into wisdom[.]⁵⁶⁶

In my experience, the teaching on *can-huatou* has rarely been mentioned at Chung Tai. I personally heard Ven. Wei-Chueh say that this method was too delicate for people in modern times, whose minds are ‘too rough’ to practise it. It is still widely taught and practised in traditional *chanqi* in Mainland China, albeit not without difficulties. As Ren has observed based on his fieldwork there, ‘many participants merely followed the timetable of *chanqi* to eat, sleep, [and] enter the meditation hall, and they could not concentrate on *huatou*. They did not know how to practice inside and outside the meditation hall.’⁵⁶⁷ Similarly, in my own fieldwork at Yunmen’s nunnery, few *chanqi* participants engaged with this traditional method. It seems reasonable to suggest that the popularity of this approach is hampered by its difficulty.

⁵⁶⁴ Batchelor (2015, 42).

⁵⁶⁵ Yunmen Monastery (2014b, 247).

⁵⁶⁶ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed May 27, 2018).

⁵⁶⁷ Ren (2014, 21).

Lastly, *zhongdao shixiang guan* was taught by Ven. Wei-Chueh to both monastic and lay practitioners as the means to achieve *wunian* and perfect Buddhahood. According to him, *zhongdao* (the mind transcending pain and pleasure) and *shixiang* (the true face of the mind) are actually one concept.

Ordinary people live in all kinds of emotions like delight, anger, sorrow, and happiness, and always dwell on the two extremes such as bright and dark, motion and stillness, happiness and pain, gain and loss, right and wrong, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, liking and disliking, accepting and rejecting. These are illusory dreams and there are barely any chances of realising *shixiang* [...]. [W]holesome thoughts are sweet dreams and unwholesome thoughts are nightmares [...]. To become liberated from the sufferings in life, it is necessary to transcend the illusory dreams of both extremes and abide in *shixiang*, which is the ultimate truth and highest goal that a practitioner can achieve.⁵⁶⁸

In practice, Ven. Wei-Chueh led *chanqi* participants to focus on their intrinsic *juexing* ('nature of awareness') as an entry point, and sustain only their *zhi* ('knowing') during meditation. Meditators must keep vigilant during meditation and avoid the four common obstacles mentioned earlier. They are taught that, when deluded thoughts arise, they are to dwell in *juexing* firmly, neither following nor dispelling the disruptions to their thoughts. If they can retain a mind without delusions even for a minute, they are believed to enter a state similar to Buddhahood during that time. If one can maintain a state similar to the enlightened mind during a whole session of meditation, it is called *yi-zhi-hao-xiang* ('a good stick of incense').⁵⁶⁹ In such cases, time is perceived to pass very quickly, with an hour of meditation seeming like just few seconds.⁵⁷⁰ And, once the notions of time and space no longer exist, the original state of mind is experienced. It is believed that Buddhahood can be achieved, and one's cycle of rebirth ended, if one continues in such a state forever, irrespective of external

⁵⁶⁸ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed May 22, 2018).

⁵⁶⁹ Since old times, incense stick serves to indicate the length of a meditation session: An incense stick lit in the middle of an incense burner marks the beginning of a sitting meditation, and incense stick burning out marks the end.

⁵⁷⁰ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed September 29, 2020).

circumstances.⁵⁷¹ In my own experience of *chanqi*, I did not have *yi-zhi-hao-xiang*, yet could sometimes meditate continuously for three to four hours without getting up. When the meditation went well, my mind felt joyous and tranquil, and my body became soft; even after the meditation session had ceased, my legs did not feel any pain.

During intensive practices, some meditators are challenged by memories that emerge suddenly and lead to emotional disturbance. Additionally, some visions become fixations: one may ‘see’ flowers, mountains, or Buddhas in meditation. In Chan tradition, it is said that these visions are reflections of one’s stored consciousness, and that if one treats them as real and becomes attached to them, there is a risk of ‘losing mindfulness.’⁵⁷² I personally heard a male university student who attended a *chanqi* at Chung Tai afterwards share his own experience that during meditation, his mind was filled with an image of an electric pot filled with many ants, which he had killed a few days before the retreat. He was overwhelmed by the vision and felt almost lost in meditation. Soon after this, Ven. Wei-Chueh arrived at the Chan hall to give a dharma talk, during which he told his listeners that all visual images one ‘sees’ in meditation are illusory, and reminded them not to become attached to them. The master then gave an example: ‘if you saw a pot of ants, that was only an illusion’.⁵⁷³ At this, the student was shocked that the master could know the image that had been in his head. Regardless of whether this was merely a coincidence, it may indicate that preaching during *chanqi* is intended, at least in part, to help practitioners who are lost to regain the right path.

Behaving correctly at the moment meditation ends is also very important, and requires considerable patience and attention. Abrupt manners are strongly forbidden, since sudden or rough bodily actions (e.g., rapidly standing up off a meditation seat) are regarded as risky to the physical body, especially if one already feels numb or in pain. They may also cause

⁵⁷¹ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed September 30, 2020).

⁵⁷² Ven. Wei-Chueh (2004, 28).

⁵⁷³ I personally heard this story when the student reported his retreat experience during the tea ceremony in Chung Tai.

difficulties when one wishes to proceed to a more sophisticated stage of meditation in the future. *Chanqi* participants at Chung Tai, for example, are guided to take a deep breath, slowly open their eyes, and start moving their bodies very tenderly and slowly before making any big moves. The recommended practice is to gently massage the body from head to toe and to relax first. These actions prepare the mind to transition from an inward-focused state to an outward-focused one, by regaining familiarity with the external sensory information. However, it is also said to help maintain a continuous state of refined concentration. After sitting meditation, everyone folds their blanket meticulously into a square shape and then leaves the meditation hall.

5.3.4 Drinking tea

Who is drinking the tea?⁵⁷⁴

In the *chanqi* of Chan Buddhism, a cup of tea not only brings comfort to the physical body and relaxation to the mind, but also serves as a method of mind-cultivation. The custom of drinking ‘Zhaozhou Tea’, derived from the classic koan of Chan master Zhaozhou (778-897), is seen as a liquid form of Chan teaching that has influenced many generations of meditators.⁵⁷⁵

The traditional tea-drinking ritual takes place in the *Chantang*, and starts with two monks (or two nuns, in the case of a nunnery) entering in close step with one another, carrying a beautiful woven-bamboo basket, followed by another two carrying several teapots. As these four monastics walk around the hall, the retreat participants withdraw their right hands from their warm blankets, and are each quickly handed one cup from the many stacked in the basket. A monk/nun with a pot then serves the tea *dingzibu* (i.e., with her feet angled at 90 degrees), as this posture stabilises the body during the necessary movements. He/she holds the teapot at

⁵⁷⁴ Ven. Wei-Chueh often asked this question during the opening of *chanqi*. See Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed March 12, 2019).

⁵⁷⁵ *Zhaozhou Heshang Yulu* J24nB137.p368c17-20. Chan Master Zhaozhou invited every visitor and disciple to an introspective tea-drinking session and sought to wake one to the origin of the mind.

45 degrees to the recipient's cup to avoid the recently boiled tea spilling over the edge of the cup and burning that person's hands. Once the cup has been filled, the recipient passes it to his/her left hand. Once the cup is brought to the lips, it is against the rules to put it down before it is empty. The monks/nuns who serve the tea usually made three circuits to refill the cups of anyone who wants more. Once finished, everyone bends down and places the cups on the floor in neat alignment with those of their neighbours. When collecting the cups, the server quickly stoops down, again *dingzibu*, and carefully lifts each one from the bottom with the fingers of both hands to avoid making any noise, and stacks them up in front of his/her chest. After all the cups have been stacked in rows in the basket, the first two servers lift it in unison, step backwards, turn around, and leave the hall. This whole process is conducted with great precision and delicacy. As Zhao has explained, the tea ritual is not about enjoyment of flavour,

because the act of tasting involving functional interplay between tongue and taste hinders awakening [... So] in the whole process [...] from receiving the cup, seeing the tea pouring into the cup, drinking the tea in one go till the cup is being collected, one should not generate any single thoughts[.]⁵⁷⁶

In other words, the mindfulness required by the act of tea-drinking in a *chanqi* context compels the practitioners to cease clinging to sensory experiences, and retain no delusions, in the moment.

5.4 Support staff

To ensure that a *chanqi* runs smoothly, it needs a group of monastics and lay volunteers who can perform various kinds of work, both inside and outside the meditation hall. The team of *jianxiang* are senior monastics with many years' experience of conducting meditative training, and are responsible for guarding the meditators in the hall, patrolling the area quietly and slowly to avoid disturbing anyone. They carefully observe the performance of each meditator, and provide immediate correction with their wooden *xiangban* if anyone falls asleep

⁵⁷⁶ Zhao (2016, 625-27).

or is sitting in the wrong posture. The presence of the *jianxiang* functions to ensure an atmosphere of rigour, conducive to the alertness and mental focus required for meditation. There is a wooden tablet called a *huimingpai* on the table beside the *jianxiang*, on which it is written: ‘Everyone’s life of wisdom counts on you alone, and if you don’t care about the whole assembly, all sins will return to you.’ This inscription reflects the sacredness of the work of *jianxiang*, as well as the close relationship that is established between the meditators and the group of senior monastics that looks after them.

During the walking meditation, I myself once experienced direct intervention by the support staff, when I could not stop my mind wandering. Very quickly, the *weinuo* sneaked into our group and hit my shoulder to signal that she knew I was drifting into the bubble of delusion. Yet, I still could not fully bring my mind back to the present moment, as past events kept clouding it. Surprisingly, she hit me a second time just a few moments later, and instructed me to walk in the most inner circle, where everyone walked the fastest. When I did so, and focused on catching up with the rapid walking speed of others, all delusions quickly vanished. I was very impressed by the *weinuo*’s sharp observation on my state of mind.

The *chanqi* I attended at Yunmen’s nunnery was relatively small, with between 50 and 70 participants. It was operated almost entirely by nuns; the abbot of Yunmen only came to host the opening ceremony and give daily instructions on meditation briefly, but there were no lay volunteers. I was told that the abbess of the nunnery did not like their gossiping, and wanted to keep the nunnery a ‘clean place’. In the first week, extremely heavy rains caused landslides in the nearby mountains, cutting the immediate vicinity of the nunnery off from water supplies. All the meditators were called out to help, and the *chanqi* was suspended for half a day. During the 21 days I spent there, I witnessed how the participants’ spiritual aspirations and practices were focused on their inner worlds, but also how they struggled with uncontrollable external conditions, including the terrible weather, limited resources, and lack of support. Such

obstacles made their performance of the *chanqi* more arduous, but simultaneously were utilised to cultivate their inner strength.

In contrast to Yunmen, Chung Tai organises large support teams outside the meditation hall where its *chanqi* are conducted. Monastics and volunteers offer support by preparing meals, cooking tea, cleaning the area, and keeping up with the monastery's day-to-day operations. When the meditators attend the dining ritual in the dining hall, a group of volunteers serve boiled rice attentively without making any noise. When the meditators leave the meditation hall, volunteers immediately go into it to neatly fold each meditation blanket and mop the floor. When the meditators return to the hall and start a session of meditation, another group of volunteers washes their cups and cleans the toilets. Nevertheless, meditators do not know about the people who quietly help them and volunteers do not expect them to know who they are but just focus on their tasks. The interaction between meditators and support staff maintain a minimal level. This kind of interaction without asking for any reward may reflect Buddhist teachings regarding no-self and altruistic service; in any case, despite the absence of mutual knowledge, meditators and volunteers work in unison in their respective roles to maintain the *chanqi* tradition.

Two eminent Chan masters, Ven. Xuyun and Ven. Laiguo,⁵⁷⁷ are known to have reached awakening during *chanqi* — the former, during the ritual of drinking tea, when the attendant poured scalding hot water into his cup, it splashed onto his hand, and the cup crashed to the floor.⁵⁷⁸ In the case of Ven. Laiguo, when the staff struck the wooden fish to signal the end of sitting meditation, he was suddenly awoken.⁵⁷⁹ In both cases, the seemingly ordinary work performed by a member of the support team provided the essential impetus for these masters to reach higher levels of spirituality.

⁵⁷⁷ Ven. Laiguo (1881-1953) was a Chan master of Linji school and was the abbot of Gaomin Monastery, one of the most famous meditation centres holding *chanqi* in Mainland China.

⁵⁷⁸ Ven. Jinghui (2016a, 26).

⁵⁷⁹ Ven. Laiguo (accessed September 30, 2020).

Welch listed the rewards of attending *chanqi* as mastering an ancient ritual, proving one's power of endurance, learning to discipline one's mind, and achieving a certain status.⁵⁸⁰ My fieldwork findings broadly support this view. In the collective setting of *chanqi*, participants follow the procedural guidance given by the host monk; endure the rigours of communal rules; and are corrected and, at times, punished by the *jianxiang* so that they can achieve the goal of enlightenment. All the support they receive from others, and provide to one another, builds a solid foundation for their concentration on meditation practices, and thus for their eventual achievement of spiritual freedom. It seems to me that *chanqi* is a sophisticated system of collective performance built on a complex web of relational support – though ultimately, awakening remains a matter for the individual.

An unenlightened mind in Chan Buddhism is like an untamed ox – hard to control. Mastering the mind is seen as analogous to herding an ox, which starts from seeking an ox to fully taming it. Thus, the completion of *chanqi* is customarily called *qi-niu-gui-jia* ('riding the ox home').⁵⁸¹ Ideally, over the course of *chanqi*, meditators let go of all thoughts, retain *juexing*, and achieve the ultimate level of mindfulness. Nevertheless, for most meditators, even simply being familiar with the procedure and rules in *chanqi* typically requires repeated participation, not to mention the relentless effort required for understanding where the 'ox' is. Consequently, annually held *chanqi* in Chan monasteries offers one an opportunity of self-challenge as well as of checking up one's spiritual progress. After *chanqi*, no matter whether one is awakened or not, they all return to their normal monastic duties, and those who have not awakened their minds must prioritise figuring out the real 'direction' of their further cultivation. Conversely, the awakened ones must strive to sustain their experiences of awakening under all kinds of real-world circumstances.

⁵⁸⁰ Welch (1967, 88).

⁵⁸¹ This concept derives from the Ten Ox-Herding Pictures in *Shiniutu Song* (X64n1269.p774b9-19) and Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed July 20, 2020).

5.5 *Chanqi* tradition across the Taiwan Strait

For Tambiah, ‘ritual consists of both fixed forms and unfixed elements, both the invariant and the variant.’⁵⁸² This point resonates with the flexibility of ritual performances in *chanqi* and the procedures I observed at Yunmen and Chung Tai. Both incorporated traditional and modern elements to fit the needs of their respective societies. Despite their shared goal and common spirit, however, some interesting contrasts between them emerged from my research. For instance, the sequences of walking meditation and sitting meditation at these monasteries were conducted in the opposite order. One explanation could relate to the weather, as *chanqi* in Mainland China are traditionally conducted in winter. Walking can effectively help to warm up the body, helping one to endure lengthy periods of sitting in meditation afterwards. In Taiwan, in contrast, the temperature is very hot and humid during the summer, and even on winter days, the average temperature is warmer than summers in the UK. Therefore, if one were to start a meditation session by walking and running, everyone would sweat and it would be difficult to sit in meditation afterwards. Secondly, *chanqi* in Mainland China is still largely conducted as an internal monastic practice, only occasionally open to lay participants,⁵⁸³ unlike in Taiwan, where it has enjoyed mass popularity since the beginning of the present century. Even at Chung Tai, however, separate *chanqi* are convened for monastics and laypeople, with the latter being given a comprehensive orientation session that is deemed unnecessary for their ordained counterparts. Moreover, to cope with almost a thousand participants per cycle, Chung Tai has simplified some parts of the traditional *chanqi*, which would be overly costly and technically difficult to manage on such a large scale. For example, the traditional tea ritual no longer takes places at the halfway point of meditation sessions, and has moved to just before

⁵⁸² Kotnik (2016, 37).

⁵⁸³ During my participation in the *chanqi* at Yunmen nunnery in 2018, they received a large number of lay participants attending the retreat with nuns. This caused some disruption, since most of the lay participants had never taken part in *chanqi* before and did not have acquaintance with the basic etiquette of using the meditation hall. In the following year, the nunnery decided not to accept any more lay participants, and one informant nun told me that the atmosphere and efficacy improved a great deal.

and just after the *chanqi*.

It can be concluded that Chung Tai's approach is aimed at improving accessibility to an old tradition, by making some adaptations in response to contemporary needs and time constraints. Thus, its *chanqi* has become simplified from the original complex ritual sequence, and is more focused on elaborating upon the traditional spirit of Chan Buddhism in a modern and rational way. Yunmen monastery, on the other hand, concentrates on restoring the ancient way and re-imagining how *chanqi* was once conducted by ancestral masters, in the wake of a long period of discontinuity, notably including the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter 6 Mindfulness in Chan Buddhist monasteries

As Krägeloh has reminded us, ‘Buddhism is predominantly a spiritual practice and does not have relaxation and enjoyment of experiences as its primary focus’.⁵⁸⁴ His view echoes with those of the monastic members of Chan monasteries, who engage with the teaching of mindfulness neither for physical and emotional wellbeing nor for enjoying this present life more fully. Rather, their present life represents a rare chance to do battle, with the wider aim of freeing themselves from endless sufferings in some countless lives, and perhaps even to attain full enlightenment in the far future. It is thus very much worth asking what ‘enlightenment’ actually means in this particular context. If this ultimate goal of Chan Buddhism can be attained through mindfulness practice, what do people do after they have achieved it and become liberated? Is there any point in practising mindfulness after that? In short, is mindfulness just a means to an end, or an end in itself?

Accordingly, this chapter addresses five closely related issues. First, it examines the interconnection of enlightenment and mindfulness in the Chan tradition. Secondly, it looks at that tradition’s somewhat circular view of the relationship between the development of mindfulness and morality. And thirdly, it will discuss how interpersonal relationships in a Chan monastic community support and foster individual liberation via intervention in the morality-mindfulness-enlightenment dynamics. Fourthly, it will consider the commonalities and divergences in Chan monastic practices between Taiwan and Mainland Chinese monasteries. It concludes with a discussion of the challenges to the mindfulness tradition in the life of Chan monastic members.

6.1 Mindfulness and enlightenment

The notion of ‘enlightenment’ is interpreted in a variety of ways in different religious

⁵⁸⁴ Krägeloh (2016).

traditions. Loy argues that it is ungraspable and thus not describable in words,⁵⁸⁵ but Chan masters have attempted to express their personal experiences in the moment of enlightenment – for instance, in this famous verse by the sixth Chan patriarch, Huineng (638-713) in the Platform Sutra:

How unexpected! The self-nature is originally pure in itself.
How unexpected! The self-nature is originally neither produced nor destroyed.
How unexpected! The self-nature is originally complete in itself.
How unexpected! The self-nature is originally without movement.
How unexpected! The self-nature can produce the ten thousand dharmas.⁵⁸⁶

As well as setting the general tone for Chan Buddhist views of enlightenment, this verse evinces several of its core features in the Chan tradition. First, it includes high praise for the inherent potential of all sentient beings. Secondly, it stresses the importance of a full discovery and manifestation of one's intrinsic true mind. And thirdly, it suggests that enlightenment cannot be sought from somewhere outside one's mind. As Ven. Wei-Chueh has put it, enlightenment is a complete realisation that the mind is the Buddha and the mind is the Way.⁵⁸⁷ In a similar vein, Ven. Foyuan suggested that Chan cultivation aims to eliminate the mental activities of delusion and maintain the purity of one's Buddha nature.⁵⁸⁸ So, in answer to the above question about the relation between mindfulness and enlightenment, the evidence indicates that the mindfulness training in Chan monasteries proceeds from a clear aim of revealing the intrinsic pure nature of a person.

Notably, some scholars have linked the contemporary secular practice of mindfulness with its emphasis on the inner potential of a human being, to the Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine regarding the Buddha nature. Saunders, for example, wrote that the rhetoric of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)

relies on the assumption that all participants are intrinsically good. Innate goodness is often construed as one's 'true self' [...]. Participants are instructed

⁵⁸⁵ Loy (1982, 65).

⁵⁸⁶ T48n2008.p349a19-21, translated by the Buddhist Text Translation Society (2002, 88).

⁵⁸⁷ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 28, 2020).

⁵⁸⁸ Yunmen Monastery (2010a, 2).

to trust in this innermost identity as a means of alleviating anxiety, stress, and discomfort [... This approach] has become widespread enough to merit the basic understanding that veritable Buddhist principles, including Tathāgatagarbha, lie at the heart of contemporary mindfulness practices.⁵⁸⁹

Kabat-Zinn, the American founder of MBSR, once practised Buddhism under a Korean Chan master, Seungsahn Haengwon (1927-2004), and has admitted that his understanding of mindfulness was inspired partly by the Chan teachings.⁵⁹⁰ Saunders's comparison between the Buddhist doctrine on Tathāgatagarbha and the western MBSR programmes on intrinsic goodness suggests that there is indeed a considerable degree of overlap between the secular practice and Chan mindfulness, at least at the level of rhetorical assumptions about true nature or self-nature of a person. However, Saunders does not address the nuanced, yet important, ways in which these two conceptions of mindfulness diverge when it comes to the actual revealing one's true self.

In Kabat-Zinn's presentation of mindfulness practices, paying attention to one's present is considered 'universal dharma', which awakens one's own nature without the need of any specific metaphysical framework.⁵⁹¹ Kabat-Zinn addresses, 'mindfulness will not conflict with any beliefs or traditions – religious or for that matter scientific – nor a new belief system or ideology'.⁵⁹² He seems to suggest that the state of mindfulness can be achieved through the experience of different religious commitments and use of various epistemological lens, and it would be equal and appropriate. Furthermore, this present-moment awareness in secular mindfulness practice is seen as sacred in its simple existence, and, thus, one's action does not require extra disciplinary regulations to purify or perfect it. Kabat-Zinn recommends secular practitioners that '[l]et go into full acceptance of the present moment...don't try to change

⁵⁸⁹ Saunders (2016, 8).

⁵⁹⁰ Kabat-Zinn (2011, 289-92) states, 'The early papers on MBSR cited not just its Theravada roots (Kornfield 1977; Nyanaponika 1962), but also its Māhāyāna roots within both the Soto (Suzuki 1970) and Rinzai (Kapleau 1965) Zen traditions (and by lineage, the earlier Chinese and Korean streams)'.

⁵⁹¹ Kabat-Zinn (ibid., 290) emphasises his understanding of 'universal dharma', which is 'co-extensive with Buddhism', yet not exclusively owned by Buddhists.

⁵⁹² Kabat-Zinn (2016).

anything at all...allow yourself to be exactly as you are...move in the direction your heart tells you to go, mindfully and with resolution'.⁵⁹³ This arguably results in a certain level of vagueness of signposting a spiritual path, in which individual intuition becomes the lifeline and authority to the miracle of mindfulness, and one unsurprisingly loses touch with a set of guidelines laid down for spiritual cultivation in Buddhist meditative traditions. Purser criticises that such practice 'over-romanticizes "being"':

[T]here is no fundamental ontological shift in being, no radical transformation of the self, or the one who knows. In other words, the experience leaves us eager to deepen it (to bring it back to life), but not to question the nature of what we hold to be true.⁵⁹⁴

However, on the surface, both Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching and secular mindfulness programs employ similar rhetoric regarding uncovering the potential of one's true nature. Based on the data collected at the two focal monasteries, I argue that the practices of mindfulness in Chan monasteries contain a more refined and specified explication and rules to support one to face the obscure and unknown territories in mind and pinpoint the unwholesome obstacles to seeing one's true nature. The monastic members mentioned in the present study, either by studying in seminaries or by attending the regular public dharma talks in the monastery, have learned detailed systematic explications of the practice in a number of spiritual levels in Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as the doctrine of *suishun juexing* (following the nature of awareness),⁵⁹⁵ the doctrine of *liujifo* (The Sixfold Buddhahood),⁵⁹⁶ *shiniutu* (Ten Ox-Herding Pictures),⁵⁹⁷ or *sanguan* (Three Barriers).⁵⁹⁸ According to my analysis, a person's spiritual

⁵⁹³ Kabat-Zinn (2016).

⁵⁹⁴ Purser (2019, 91-92).

⁵⁹⁵ The doctrine is in the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment (T17n842), containing the four levels of practices on being in unity with one's pure intrinsic awareness. For details, see Muller and Kihwa (1999).

⁵⁹⁶ It was established by Ven. Zhiyi (538-97), who explicitly mentioned the stages of cultivation from ordinary beings to Buddhahood. For more details, see Ven. Chuanyin (accessed January 19, 2021).

⁵⁹⁷ *Shiniutu* describes that the Chan path towards Buddhahood comprises ten stages. There are at least three versions of the *shiniutu*, and each version is presented in the form of a series of verses and illustrations. See Green (2017).

⁵⁹⁸ *Sanguan* refers to various levels of awakening one's mind, from passing *chuguan* (the first barrier) as the breakthrough of one's ego consciousness to *chongguan* (the second barrier) as dissolving one's dharma-bondage to *shengsi laoguan* (the third barrier) as breaking the fundamental ignorance. See Ven. Wei-Chueh

development from an un-enlightened state to an enlightened one and the distinctions in moral behaviours and epistemological understandings of reality that mark these two states are what Western secular mindfulness has overlooked, whether deliberately or otherwise.

There is a popular Chan saying that goes, ‘Great awakening thousands of times; small awakening thousands of times’,⁵⁹⁹ which highlights the numerous degrees and types of awakening-related experiences referred to above. In Chang’s words, awakening ‘varies greatly from the shallow glimpse of the mind-essence of the beginners to full Buddhahood as realized by the Buddha’. He further argues that awakening is ‘one and also many’: one ‘because they are identical in essence’; many ‘because they are different in profundity, clearness, and proficiency’.⁶⁰⁰ Likewise, Gregory explains, ““awakening” can refer to both the process of its actualization [... and] the experience in which it is finally consummated.”⁶⁰¹ At the very least, it can be concluded that the path to enlightenment in Chan tradition is an ongoing process of rich multi-layered experiences.

Chan masters often explain the path to full enlightenment in terms of the phases of the Moon, from crescent to full.⁶⁰² For example, Ven. Wei-Chueh likened the initial stage of awakening to the crescent moon, and the attainment of perfect enlightenment to the large and bright full moon.⁶⁰³ That is, despite the Moon itself remaining the same, the brightness of its crescent form differs sharply from that of its full form. Having an initial awakening into the true nature of mind, conceived of as the start of enlightenment, is called *kaiwu*; but in this state, deeply rooted vexation and ignorance in its subtlest form are yet to be removed.⁶⁰⁴ Ven. Wei-

(accessed September 18, 2020).

⁵⁹⁹ *Yunqi Fahui* (J33nB277.p53c19-22). It is compiled in 1637-1638 by Pure Land master Ven. Zhuhong (1535-1615), who advocated the unity of Chan practices and Pure Land practices.

⁶⁰⁰ Chang (1957).

⁶⁰¹ Gregory (1987, 284).

⁶⁰² Moon is used as a symbol of the fullness of one’s Buddha nature in Chan poems; for example, see *Yongjia Zhengdaoge* (the Song of Enlightenment T48n2014.p395c09) by Chan Master Ven. Yongjia Xuanjue (665-713). For more details about the Song of Enlightenment, see Ven. Shen-Yen (2002).

⁶⁰³ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed October 10, 2020).

⁶⁰⁴ I am aware of the scholarly debates on sudden and gradual enlightenment; however, this discussion is beyond the scope of this study. For an in-depth discussion, for example, see Gregory (1987).

Chueh commented, real cultivation begins after *kaiwu*, in a phase called *wu-hou-qi-xiu-fang-shi-zhen-xiu* (authentic practice comes after initial awakening). A similar idea also appears in Poceski's explanation, 'sudden awakening is only the beginning of a long and essentially gradual process of spiritual cultivation that culminates with the realization of Buddhahood.'⁶⁰⁵ After that, practitioners must experience *baoren* – retention of the enlightened state for a certain length of time – and break through all delusion and afflictions completely.⁶⁰⁶ As Ven. Wei-Chueh put it,

[o]nce awakened, we still need to maintain this enlightened understanding and practice until we achieve perfection. This means that whether we are in stillness or in motion, whether it is day or night, the [true] mind is always free from clinging and delusion.⁶⁰⁷

Ven. Foyuan used the simile of an insulated bottle keeping hot water warm to refer to the continuous efforts required by the practitioner to experience the 'true state' of one's mind as it is after *kaiwu*. Regarding the true, bodhi mind, he recommended, 'keep an eye on it, do not let it get away [...]. When you become *kaiwu*, you must keep "this thing".'⁶⁰⁸ The path to enlightenment beyond *kaiwu* can thus be seen as a constant process of sustaining the awoken state, in which mindfulness acts to guard the state free from all kinds of temptations and distractions. This implies that mindfulness and the state of being awake are closely intertwined with each other, and indeed, that their interrelationship is ceaseless, even after enlightenment has been attained.

The cases of the three masters as described in Chapter 2 also provide actual examples of *baoren*. That is, having had their minds awoken, these masters did not hide in seclusion, but built temples, cultivated farms, and sought to help liberate their disciples. On the one hand, their efforts were driven by the altruistic spirit of the Bodhisattva Way. On the other, they could

⁶⁰⁵ Poceski (2006, 32).

⁶⁰⁶ This length of time may vary with people in the tradition, depending on one's diligence. See Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed October 11, 2020).

⁶⁰⁷ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed June 17, 2018).

⁶⁰⁸ Yunmen Monastery (2010a, 62).

be seen as testing their faith by facing all kinds of circumstances and sufferings. A well-known *koan* asks the question, ‘After seeing the full moon, what will happen next?’, highlighting the task of the practitioner who has attained that almost perfect state. Ven. Wenyan, the founding master of the Yunmen School and Yunmen Monastery, famously offered an answer: ‘Every day is a good day’.⁶⁰⁹ This oft-quoted answer has generally been taken to suggest that when one’s own intrinsic true mind – a state of neither gain nor loss, neither joy nor sorrow – has been realised, one constantly dwells in tranquillity, even in the midst of adversity.

The notion of enlightenment is a highly attractive ideal that practitioners strive for conceptually. However, most practitioners are merely ordinary people, and are not enlightened. Thus, it is assumed that lengthy, painstaking efforts and diligent cultivation of all kinds of meritorious practices will be necessary before they can achieve their ultimate goal of enlightenment. And, during this un-enlightened stage of cultivation, namely *jiaxing*, one is said to continuously feel hesitant and unclear about where the Way is, due to the mental distance that still separates the practitioner from the ultimate truth.⁶¹⁰ So this may raise the question, ‘What is the relationship between mindfulness and the stage of “non-enlightenment”’?

The abbot of Yunmen Monastery told me that *yun-men-san-ju*,⁶¹¹ the ‘three phrases of Yunmen’, serve as the core guidelines whereby practitioners affiliated with Yunmen’s lineage could proceed from non-enlightenment to enlightenment. As he explained it, in the first phrase, *han-gai-qian-kun* (‘covering the universe’), a practitioner should perceive that all phenomena are manifestations of one’s mind. In the second, *jie-duan-zhong-liu* (‘cut off all currents’), the *han-gai-qian-kun* insight that all things are illusory enables a person to stop the currents of vexations in his/her inner world. Then, in the final phase, *sui-bo-zhu-lang* (‘drift with the

⁶⁰⁹ *Yunmen Kuangzhen Chanshi Guanglu* (The Collection of Yunmen Kuangzhen Chan Master T47n1988.p563b17-18). It is believed to have been compiled by Ven. Deshan Yuanming (?~949), the disciple of Ven. Wenyan.

⁶¹⁰ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed September 27, 2020).

⁶¹¹ The ‘three phrases of Yunmen’ can be traced back to the record in *Yunmen Kuangzhen Chanshi Guanglu* (T47n1988.p576b21-29).

waves'), one's mind can act freely, unaffected by any obstructions.⁶¹² Niu suggests that the first phrase is to understand one's Buddha nature, the second phrase is the means of realising one's Buddha nature, and the final phrase is to *baoren* one's Buddha nature.⁶¹³ Gu suggests that *yun-men-san-ju* features universality, transcendence, and how to relate to the world.⁶¹⁴ Taken together, *yun-men-san-ju* implies that the core features of the Chan enlightenment path not only include earnestly and sharp observation of one's mind, but also change one's habitual notions onto all phenomena to enable one to interact with worldly activities yet remain free from clinging to anything in the world.

Similarly, at Chung Tai, Ven. Wei-Chueh provided his disciples with a three-step formula for progressing their cultivation from an 'unenlightened' to an 'enlightened' state: *juecha*, *juezhao*, and *juewu*. *Juecha* refers to being very clear about one's inner world and noticing whether all thoughts that arise within one's mind are wholesome or unwholesome. This is likened to noticing if a thief breaks into one's house. *Juezhao*, meanwhile, means combating unwholesome thoughts with wholesome ones, such as reciting Buddha's name to subdue one's anger, which is akin to catching the thief. And lastly, in *juewu*, unwholesome thoughts are dissolved, and the mind dwells in the nature of awareness: as if the thief has been fully rehabilitated and is living a good life. Ven. Wei-Chueh explained:

Once the mind gives rise to delusion and generates unwholesome thoughts, [we] should immediately repent and change, abide in right mindfulness and follow the nature of awareness[.]⁶¹⁵

These words imply that every moment of one's Chan practice must involve persistent self-training in mindfulness if one is to protect one's mind from the intrusion of thoughts that are not conducive to liberation. Similarly, Kuan has recently argued that early Buddhist mindfulness was associated closely with the need 'to protect himself from evil unwholesome

⁶¹² Fieldnote recorded in July 2016.

⁶¹³ Niu (2012, 137).

⁶¹⁴ Gu (2012, 277-78).

⁶¹⁵ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2019).

states of covetousness and dejection, which result from contact with attractive objects.’⁶¹⁶ Such teaching is often applied in tangible forms in day-to-day monastic life. As we saw in Chapter 4, self-reflective diaries are often kept in seminaries as a means of cultivating one’s awareness; and the rigorous rules around many seemingly small daily tasks such as folding quilts and cloth tidily, keeping the living environment spotless, and moving chairs without any sound are also regarded as serve that purpose. Awareness, in turn, is seen as conducive to guarding the mind against greed, anger, and ignorance.

According to Ven. Wei-Chueh, *wunian* is the highest level of mindfulness.⁶¹⁷ In the *Platform Sutra*, it is deemed the central doctrine of Chan Buddhism, as explained in this passage:

What is ‘*wunian*’? To understand and perceive all dharmas, with a mind free from attachment and defilement, that is ‘*wunian*.’ When in use, this mind pervades everywhere, yet it does not cling to anything. We only have to purify our mind so that the six consciousnesses exit the six gates (senses) without being contaminated or defiled by the six dusts (sense objects). Coming and going freely, the mind functions without hindrances, that is prajna *samādhi*; that is to be free and liberated. That is the practice of ‘*wunian*.’ But if we suppress all thoughts and do not think of anything, that is dharma bondage⁶¹⁸ and is an extreme view.⁶¹⁹ Noble friends, those who realize the doctrine of ‘*wunian*’ thoroughly understand all dharmas; those who realize the doctrine of ‘*wunian*’ perceive the realm of the buddhas; those who realize the doctrine of ‘*wunian*’ attain Buddhahood.⁶²⁰

Likewise, the abbot of Yunmen told me that abiding in one’s true nature is equivalent to the ultimate mindfulness. That being the case, the idea of *wunian* does not involve rejection or disparagement of Buddhist practices, and nor does it denote doing nothing. Rather, *wunian* stresses the need to ‘put down’ one’s practices or leave behind them after they are completed, and to return to and rest unceasingly in one’s intrinsic nature, where conceptual distinctions are

⁶¹⁶ Kuan (2015, 270).

⁶¹⁷ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed May 28, 2020).

⁶¹⁸ Dharma bondage refers to the situation in which one fails to see the real point of Buddhist teaching and mistakenly follows the literal interpretation of the text.

⁶¹⁹ It highlights that *wunian* is different from being ash-like and dead state and is not trapped in the extremes of nihilism or eternalism.

⁶²⁰ T48n2008.p0351a27-b05, translated by Chung Tai Chan Monastery (2009b, 16-18).

transcended.

To sum up, on the path towards enlightenment and seeing one's true nature, mindfulness is not merely a matter of 'accepting who I am', but involves multiple efforts to make ethical distinctions, to develop self-awareness, and to see the reality without prejudice more generally. For the unenlightened, the main aim of the practice of mindfulness focuses on continually guarding the mind against delusional thoughts; and when delusion nevertheless arises, it enables one to use all one's strength to stop and transform it with wholesome thoughts, or even attain the state of *wunian* finally. For a person who has already become enlightened, meanwhile, mindfulness involves maintaining the mind in an awakened state at all times, and resting in one's true nature. Thus, mindfulness is seen to be both the means to achieving the ultimate goal, and the goal itself.

6.2 The reciprocal relation between mindfulness and morality

Stanley and his colleagues have argued that ethics are the crux of the current heated debates over traditional and modern approaches to mindfulness.⁶²¹ Some secular mindfulness teachers propose that mindfulness is a 'free agent' and should be ethically neutral,⁶²² while others, including Krägeloh, argue that morality within mindfulness practices ought to be sufficiently 'plural' to suit everyone's religious values and cultural frameworks.⁶²³ However, many Buddhist scholars insist that mindfulness is inseparable from a Buddhist moral framework,⁶²⁴ notably in its promotion of an 'awareness that clearly distinguishes between wholesome and unwholesome mental states.'⁶²⁵ For Mikulas, 'ethical behaviour facilitates the development of mindfulness, and the cultivation of mindfulness facilitates acting ethically and

⁶²¹ Stanley et al. (2018, 5).

⁶²² Purser et al. (2016, vii).

⁶²³ Krägeloh (2016).

⁶²⁴ Many scholars insist that mindfulness is part of a larger system of Buddhist belief with strong ethical elements. For details, see, among others, Bhikkhu Bodhi (2011) and Dreyfus (2011).

⁶²⁵ Gleig (2019, 57).

appropriately’;⁶²⁶ and Kuan goes so far as to suggest that states such as ‘covetousness and dejection’, which mindfulness protects a person against, are actually ‘evil’.⁶²⁷

Here, it should be noted that the ethical distinctions maintained in and by Chan monasteries are seen as necessary to preventing their members from straying into wrong ways or other dangers during their meditative endeavours, and ensuring that they are genuinely progressing towards ending their cycles of rebirth. In its description of the teaching of *si-zhong-qing-jing-ming-hui* (‘the four decisive pure deeds’), the Mahāyāna *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* – which is popular and influential within Chan Buddhism – makes it clear that meditative practices without a moral framework may lead people into dangers, even to the point of ruining their chances of entering nirvana.

Even very intelligent people who can enter *samādhi* while practicing meditation in stillness will be certain to fall into the realm of demons upon their rebirth if they have not renounced sexual activity. [...] Even very intelligent people who can enter *samādhi* while practicing meditation in stillness are certain to fall into the realm of ghosts and spirits upon their rebirth if they have not renounced all killing [...]. Even very intelligent people who can enter *samādhi* while practicing meditation in stillness will be certain to fall into an evil realm upon their rebirth if they have not renounced stealing [...]. [And] beings in the worlds’ six destinies may be entirely free, in body and in mind of killing, stealing, and sexual desire, but their *samādhi* will not be pure if they make false claims.⁶²⁸

In the doctrinal context of my two focal monasteries, prohibitions on human activities that might seem like ‘bondage’ from a secular viewpoint are actually perceived as a means to liberation from suffering for the monastic members. Each precept is perceived to untangle a particular kind of mental affliction,⁶²⁹ and it is believed that a person will gain complete freedom from rebirth if he/she can keep to the precepts and be diligent in the practice of meditation guided by correct views.⁶³⁰ Together, then, mindfulness and morality in Chan

⁶²⁶ Mikulas (2018, 118).

⁶²⁷ Kuan (2008, 42).

⁶²⁸ Buddhist Text Translation Society (2009, 263-76).

⁶²⁹ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed October 1, 2020).

⁶³⁰ Ven. Wei-Chueh (accessed December 10, 2020).

monasteries are seen to point to the same goal, which is the state without delusion or any unwholesome thoughts. Following this, I would argue that living in accordance with the Buddhist precepts and monastic rules is seen as intimately connected to monastics' establishment of themselves in mindfulness.

As we have seen in Chapter 2 and 4, engaging in physical labour and immersing oneself in the work of the community are also a practical means of causing one's mundane mental attitude to subside in the moral environment of Chan monasteries. The Chan masters' life-narratives likewise demonstrate a connection between mindfulness and suffering, and I have demonstrated that their mindfulness was not cultivated in pleasant and relaxing environments, but was established through the challenges of hard physical chores and mental restraint. This tradition of labour shows that Chan masters' teachings on mindfulness – though lacking any fixed form – have nevertheless often consisted of pointing out their students' 'delusion' during various kinds of manual work as sensuality, ill-will, and afflictive emotion can easily disturb practitioners who are busy, sick, or physically drained.

The intricate interrelationship of mindfulness and morality is not only reflected in the outward signs of regulated behaviour or physical labour, however. Even more importantly, it lies in a revolutionary process of reversing one's old thinking, to see things as they 'really are'. As Kuan puts it, mindfulness steers one's cognition to whatever is 'wholesome and conducive to insight that leads to liberation'.⁶³¹ The crucial role of the contemplation of body and mind was highlighted in a sermon by Ven. Wei-Chueh on the four establishments of mindfulness (the four *Satipaṭṭhāna*), which are mindfulness of the body, feelings/sensations, mind/consciousness, and dharma:

All sentient beings have the four kinds of *diandao* [illusions and distortions] [... They take] the impure for the pure, the bitter for the happy, the impermanent for the permanent, and the no-self for the self [...]. In order to eradicate these four kinds of *diandao*, we have to practice *sinianchu* [the four

⁶³¹ Kuan (2008, 114).

establishments of mindfulness] to transform our mind into wisdom and free our mind from suffering.⁶³²

In other words, he implies that mindfulness involves dealing with one's prejudices and dissolving erroneous views, and this is vital to ending one's sufferings. While the doctrine of the four establishments of mindfulness is often regarded as fundamental to the Vipassana practice or the Insight Meditation Movement,⁶³³ it is worth noting that it is also widely regarded as a fundamental teaching in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, at least in the two Chan monasteries I studied. From this perspective, various Buddhist traditions can be seen as sharing the epistemological understanding of mindfulness, rooted in the essential teaching of the four *Satipaṭṭhāna*.⁶³⁴

Sharf has claimed that Chan masters tend to 'deprecate or even reject' contemplative techniques such as corpse meditations, breathing exercises, repentance rituals, and the recitation of the names of the buddhas.⁶³⁵ It would be difficult for me to endorse such an idea, based on my experience of the two Chan monasteries under study here. Monastic practitioners at both those sites are introduced to a variety of contemplative meditation methods,⁶³⁶ which they accept as highly useful means to make them see the reality of things and help them eradicate sensual desires, ignorance, and attachments. As Ven. Wei-Chueh has repeatedly stressed, all contemplative meditations are 'like medicine to cure one's troubles, greed, hatred, ignorance, arrogance, doubts'; and as long as those problems persists, the medicine remains necessary. When one is completely cured, however, one should stop taking it.⁶³⁷ In his view, while performing these contemplative practices, the mind is still in continual flux of thoughts. The mind should put down these efforts to attain the ultimate state of mindfulness (see 5.2.1).

⁶³² Ven. Wei-Chueh (2020).

⁶³³ For example, see Lau (2017, 36; 49; 134).

⁶³⁴ Kuan (2008:44) points out that the four *Satipaṭṭhānas* 'serve the purpose of protection' and prevent practitioners from the temptation of the five cords of sensual pleasure.

⁶³⁵ Sharf (2014, 938).

⁶³⁶ For example, *bujingguan* (meditation on impurity), *cibeiguan* (the compassion-contemplation), or *nianfo* (recollection of the Buddha).

⁶³⁷ Ven. Wei-Chueh (2017, 81).

6.3 Communal support for practices

If attaining enlightenment were ultimately an individual matter, it would be reasonable to question why monastics decide to spend their whole lives in confined communities. Or we could ask if mindfulness is best cultivated in the monastery? From the views of monastic members in Chung Tai or Yunmen, the context of a disciplinary monastery is seen as a ‘mindfulness-friendly’ environment, including monastic education, communal rules, and senior’s advice and peer’s monitoring, all together ensure one’s mental and physical behaviours in line with mindfulness. The environment outside the monastery lack of these supportive power, therefore one needs to fully rely on self-surveillance, check up on one’s progress on mindfulness, and concurrently confront temptations in a secular society.

In Chapter 4, I have demonstrated how the concept of *suizhong* is stressed in the moral community of a Chan monastery and described how individuals’ moral disciplinary power and self-awareness are naturally supported and gradually enhanced through a collective lifestyle that follow communal rules and daily routines. As the *Chixiu Baizhang Qinggui* notes, ‘it is not difficult for all of us to work together to achieve the goal, even if it is to transcend the “Ten Grounds” in an instant.’⁶³⁸ The power of self-discipline and self-awareness aimed at liberating the mind from unwholesomeness is seen to be intertwined with the power derived of collective ‘togetherness’. It can be argued that, as in any other battle, the battle against one’s mundane desires and habitus is more winnable when one is accompanied by many others who share the same enemy and the same objective.

In a monastic community, members live in very close proximity in their day to day striving. For that reason, it is often stressed in monasteries that one must learn to retain awareness of one’s actions so as not to cause any disturbance and become a nuisance to others.

⁶³⁸ T48n2025.p1152a5. Ten Grounds (*daśabhūmi*) refer to the ten highest reaches of the Bodhisattva path towards Buddhahood in Māhāyāna Buddhism.

This type of awareness is called *hunian*.⁶³⁹ According to Amaro,

we affect each other. What we do and say has an impact on those with whom we live and work and with whom we communicate [...]. in Buddhist practice, there are clear guidelines for behaviours so that our action and speech will conduce to the well-being of others as well as ourselves.⁶⁴⁰

Very often, the capacity to care for others requires the development of attentiveness in one's own thoughts, speech, and actions. Thus, a person seeking to develop *hunian* learns to be very mindful of his/her every movement. As the *Guishan Jingce* states, 'Rising from their seats in an agitated manner, they disturb other people's minds';⁶⁴¹ and as we have seen in Chapter 4, the practices of closing the door carefully or ensuring the toilet remains clean after use are considered opportunities for mindfulness training. In addition, the cautiousness of interpersonal interactions carefully, aimed at the avoidance of any erotic craving, can be viewed in the same light.

Several scholars have recognised that the emphasis on mindfulness is strongly linked to interaction and interpersonal relationships. Mikulas, for instance, states that 'mindfulness is critical to optimal attachment reduction';⁶⁴² and Kuan notes that self-restraint in mindfulness practices is not only a 'self-protection' for one's spiritual cultivation, but also to protect others as well:

[M]indfulness is associated with forbearance, harmlessness, loving-kindness and sympathy, and is thus applied to some ethical attitudes with regard to interpersonal relations. The practice of mindfulness helps one develop beneficial and wholesome attitudes towards others and can thus protect others.⁶⁴³

Amid the close bonds that develop in the monastic communal life, everyone's strengths

⁶³⁹ This term is common in many sutras such as The Diamond Sutra or The Platform Sutra. According to *Fahua Yishu* (T34n1721.p586b4-5), *hu* refers to protecting against external evils and *nian* refers to generating internal wholesomeness.

⁶⁴⁰ Amaro (2018, 79).

⁶⁴¹ *Guishan Jingce* (*Guishan's Admonitions*) was composed by Chan Master Guishan Lingyou (771-853) during the reign of the Tang dynasty and is still a prominent learning material regarding monastic discipline and morality in contemporary Chan monasteries. Its earliest manuscript was the Dunhuang manuscript discovered during the twentieth century. For more details, see Poceski (2006, 24).

⁶⁴² Mikulas (2018, 115).

⁶⁴³ Kuan (2015, 283).

and weaknesses are readily discerned in the community. A communal living can be stressful for some, but it could also an environment to enhance one's cultivation of mindfulness. On one occasion during my fieldwork at Xiaoxitian, I was about to wash my hands, and as soon as I turned on the tap, the nun next to me stopped me and solemnly told me that I was wasting water as the flow coming through the tap was too strong. I had not considered this before.⁶⁴⁴ This incident showed me the value placed upon peer observation, which fostered mutual growth and development in the *saṃgha*, as expressed in the *Sifen Biqiuni Jieben (The Bhiksuni Pratimoksa Adopted From Dharmaguptakas)*,

the disciples of the Buddha will benefit by admonishing one another, teaching one another, and making confession to one another[.]⁶⁴⁵

Sometimes, comments from senior members or one's peers serve as a mirror for monastics who would otherwise fail to 'see' their own problems and blind spots. One's reflective awareness is also strengthened through the monastic culture of mutual monitoring and reminding. Similarly, encouragement from one's peers can also help a practitioner who may be losing his/her motivation on the path of cultivation.

As discussed in previous chapters, monastic works are rotated, and the division of labour in the various *fahui* creates various opportunities for cooperation and other forms of interaction with monastic peers and lay volunteers. Ideally, monastics learn to cultivate a sense of 'equality' towards people: in this case, defined as the reduction or avoidance of desires and cravings for those one develops close feelings, and the dispelling of anger against those one dislikes. Keeping an emotional distance or cultivating a feeling of 'equality' is seen as a protective guard for oneself as much as for those others in the monastic community. In addition, taking on diverse work roles and learning a wide range of skills embraces the idea that everyone should actively help each other. This reflects the Mahāyāna ideal of Bodhisattva Way for

⁶⁴⁴ Fieldnote recorded in January 2018.

⁶⁴⁵ T22n1431.p1033a3-5. For English translation, see *The Bhiksuni Pratimoksa Adopted From Dharmaguptakas* (2010, 14).

learning all kinds of knowledge and benefiting all sentient beings. Through this process, it is believed that one can break away from attachment to oneself and narrow emotions, and instead develop a broader and undifferentiated mindset. As such, Chan monastics' cultivation of mindfulness emerges at virtually the same moments that they serve and interact with others.

The Four Tenets of Chung Tai reads: 'To our elders be respectful; to our juniors be kind; with all humanity be harmonious; in all endeavours be true.'⁶⁴⁶ It reflects not only the principles in their daily practice, but also their philosophy of human relationships. While the principles certainly imply that a culture of harmonious co-existence is essential to sustaining a large community, they also relate to the spiritual development of each practitioner. As Heine has noted, interpersonal interactions and relations of exchange are essential means for Chan Buddhists to 'determine truth'.⁶⁴⁷ In other words, 'truth' for Chan monastics resides in their human relationships, which are viewed as a field for the cultivation of merit as well as opportunities to observe and correct their own intolerance, attachment, and other limitations.

6.4 Cross-Strait differences

Ven. Xingguo, a high-ranking monk at Yunmen, once recalled that the moment he set foot in Chung Tai for the first time, in 2016, he felt that it was *chanzong daochang*: a Chan monastery. When I asked him what made him feel this way, despite the profound differences in the appearance and configuration of the two sites, he said that the main reason was Chung Tai's emphasis on disciplinary rules. Another reason was that he saw Chung Tai monastics conscientiously focusing on their own duties and working hard.⁶⁴⁸ In other words, Ven. Xingguo perceived an 'authentic' Chan monastery's central features were its ethical mode of conduct and hard physical labour. Conversely, during my first visit to Yunmen monastery, with a scholarly seminar group, I saw the monks performing *chanqi*, the dining ritual, and *nongchan*

⁶⁴⁶ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed November 8, 2019).

⁶⁴⁷ Heine (2003, 538).

⁶⁴⁸ Fieldnote recorded in January 2018.

and recognised strong similarities between their monastic practices and those of Chung Tai. Also, during my conversations with the abbot of Yunmen, it occurred to me that despite these two monasteries being situated in totally different political and social contexts, and having almost no interaction with each other, they maintained similar doctrinal understandings of the Chan cultivation method, especially regarding the realisation of one's true mind.

In both monasteries, I noticed that the conversation about the path towards enlightenment was broadly similar: describing Buddhist cultivation as a journey of constant self-improvement, in which one must confront one's own mind, transform unwholesome thoughts, change one's *xiqi* ('habituated tendencies'), and endure the hardships of self-restraint. Unlike secular lifestyles aimed at the enjoyment of a comfortable life, their goal is a life of simplicity that lowers or even extinguishes craving for any worldly pleasures. This is rooted in beliefs that the cycle of endless rebirth is more bitter than anything else, and that the potential reward of escaping the cycle makes it worthwhile to face one's own flaws without leniency, break off wrong acts, and cultivate good deeds. In addition, selfless, wholehearted devotion to the *daochang* (the monastery in which one resides), while retaining a lucid and focused mind, is regarded by both these communities as a means of discovering of one's true nature.⁶⁴⁹

Ven. Xingguo argued that every monastic in Yunmen had his/her own way of interpreting what 'mindfulness' means. Nevertheless, it seemed to me that a commonality could be discerned; that is, even if everyone uses different Buddhist methods, the common purpose among them is to achieve the cessation of affliction and delusion through the eradication of the discursive mind. Thus, while the term 'mindfulness practice' (*zhengnian lianxi*) may not exist in the cases of these Chan monasteries, the teaching of mindfulness permeates their monastic life, since without mindfulness, none of their other practices could be conducted properly. As

⁶⁴⁹ One of the representative stories is the story of Ven. Jixing (1875/1876-1924), a disciple of Ven. Xuyun. He was born in poverty, and after becoming a monk, he diligently served various physical duties in the monastery. He passed away with miraculous signs and was believed to attain Arhathood. See Ven. Jinghui (2016a, 79).

such, mindfulness (*zhengnian*) could be described as the ‘soul’ of Chan monastic life.

In addition, both monasteries rely on their respectable masters as role models, a process that becomes a source of faith and inspiration in their mindfulness practices. Chiu’s study of contemporary Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan and Mainland China likewise points out that within a religious group, an outstanding charismatic leader is important to bringing all members together, and that he/she can shape the group’s direction even after passing away.⁶⁵⁰ The knowledge of mindfulness is thus passed down orally by Chan masters, transmitted via their personal demonstrations, and constructed through interaction with them.⁶⁵¹ Moreover, the scriptural knowledge taught in the seminaries at both Yunmen and Chung Tai is based on ancient Chinese Buddhist texts and the sermons of ancient and modern Chan masters; books written by modern Chinese or foreign scholars are not included in their current syllabi. This reflects both monasteries’ views that Buddhism is about actual practices, and that learning should therefore be drawn from the examples set by experienced and enlightened individuals whose practices and knowledge were, or are, in harmony.

This is not to suggest, however, that no important cross-Strait divergences could be discerned. Indeed, it was only when I began conducting my fieldwork in Mainland China that I first became aware of the many sharp differences that could exist even between Chan monasteries from the same lineage. Among the most noticeable are the scope of religious activities and the style of dharma propagation, which are bound up with politics and other features of the wider societies in which the monasteries are embedded. At Yunmen, these activities are confined within the monastery walls, and laypeople who wish to gain access to its Chan teachings must physically come into the temple, to volunteer, pray, or attend various ritual activities. In addition, I observed that Yunmen’s religious activities involved much more

⁶⁵⁰ Chiu (2016, 187).

⁶⁵¹ It is worth considering how long the masters’ influence will last as they pass away. This could be the next research subject as well as an important point of observation.

complex negotiation with local and even national levels of state authority. My monk informant at Yunmen alluded to certain limitations on their religious development under China's religious policy. In addition, based on my observation in 2019, when Yunmen Monastery held the 10th memorial ceremony for the passing of Ven. Foyuan and the full ordination ceremony, they needed to report their ceremonial plan and receive approval from BAC and local government. Before the ceremonies began, local officers visited the monastery to show their care and concern. Large gathering activities can be sensitive and large-scale events require local consent. My fieldwork resonates with the observation made by Laliberté (2019) that establishing good relations with local government is important for temples.

Chung Tai, in contrast, has brought the dharma to its modern society, having established scores of branches nationwide and effectively reinventing itself as a large, autonomous Buddhist organisation with wider influence across Taiwanese society, and able to perform new functions such as establishing museums and schools with modern humanist values. In addition, I noticed that the material living conditions at Yunmen Monastery and its affiliated nunneries were sharply different from those at Chung Tai. During my fieldwork, it took considerable effort to adapt to showers without electrically heated water in winter, and to hand-washing clothes without a spinning machine during the rainy season.

I also found the general religious atmosphere of the two monasteries to be quite different. Chung Tai is a much more 'conservative' institution, which encourages their monastic members to concentrate on their spiritual practices and discourages any contacts with other monastics outside the monastery to avoid from potentially being 'polluted' and influenced by 'wrong views'. However, their monastic members are given abundant resources and strong support within its well-established organisational structure. This, of course, also means that there are more communal rules and regulations reinforcing each member's place in the collectivity. At Yunmen, in contrast, the institution is open to monastics from across Mainland

China, who stay there for periods of their own choosing. This lends each monastic a level of autonomy and independence, including responsibility for their own needs and practices. In addition, the dress code of Yunmen monastics was not strict. Most wore only short garments, even without socks, to meet the practical needs of their various day-to-day tasks. Lay supporters did not object to this kind of lapse, seeing it as a sign that the monastics were working diligently, rather than as a violation of the norm that oblige them to dress solemnly. Monastics at Chung Tai, in contrast, are required to dress properly at all times and in all places as an important aspect of their mindfulness cultivation.

Despite there being no language barrier between people in Mainland China and Taiwan, the style of communication in these two institutions is rather dissimilar. When I first came to Yunmen, I had a feeling that – whether I was conversing with fellow monastics or lay practitioners – my communication style was perceived as rather different and unfamiliar to them. Compared to those of my interlocutors, my words were both too ‘soft’ and too profuse. This seemed to resonate with Liang’s experience when she conducted fieldwork in Mainland China. As a Taiwanese, her language was often described by her Mainland informants and friends as having *taiwan qiang* (‘Taiwanese accent’), which was further described of being made up of ‘the many changing beginning and end of sentences with meaningless exclamations [... and] a soft, sticky feeling’.⁶⁵² For example, when I needed something, I usually would start the conversation by saying *bu-hao-yi-si* (‘excuse me’) to get someone’s attention and then consulted them if they had the item I needed before I made a request. My interlocutors often looked puzzled and even impatient as they tried to make out what I was trying to say. Conversely, I noticed that their conversation, whether between monastic peers or a monastic and a layperson, were much more straightforward and to the point without any extraneous courtesies.

⁶⁵² Liang (2017, 50).

6.5 Challenges to mindfulness in Chan monasteries

In 6.1, I argued that the key to understanding the difference between contemporary Chan mindfulness practiced in Chinese monasteries and secular mindfulness popular in the West is that, in the context of Chan monasteries, the emphasis is on perfecting one's moral behaviour in the practice and fully internalising Buddhist epistemological knowledge, which are the necessary conditions to spiritual liberation. In contrast to the emphasis on the present moment in secular mindfulness,⁶⁵³ the practice of mindfulness in Chan monasteries is about overcoming afflictions, attachments, and mundane habitual tendencies to discover one's 'true' nature. As such, an accurate understanding of the practice of mindfulness in Chan monasteries must be grounded in the holistic system of morality, which incorporates the Buddhist precepts, purity rules, and communal norms and regulations in the monastic community. However, it is also worth asking how far does such knowledge of mindfulness, specifically as practised and transmitted by the monastic members of Chan monasteries, be accessible to – let alone adopted by the general public at large.

Indeed, many dimensions of monastic mindfulness practices may appear, from a secular perspective, almost de-humanising. For example, some of the most basic needs of being a human person, such as enjoying good food, sex, and a normative length of sleep, are restricted in the monastic life of Chan practitioners, or even forbidden altogether. Thus, a monastery could be seen as a restrictive and difficult environment to live in for most people, even for a few months, let alone many years, decades, or even a lifetime.

According to the Chung Tai's official data, it is recorded that the founder abbot; Ven. Wei-Chueh, had nearly a million lay disciples, out of whom only around 2,000 people chose to become monastic disciples.⁶⁵⁴ Over 15 years between 2002 and 2016, I observed that those

⁶⁵³ For 'present momentism', see Purser (2019, 90).

⁶⁵⁴ Chung Tai Chan Monastery (accessed November 31, 2019).

who remained in the Chung Tai community numbered only about one thousand monastic disciples or more. Due to the difficulty of knowing anyone's true state of mind, it is impossible to find out how many of those monastics truly benefitted from the practice of what the Chan tradition claims to be 'enlightenment', or even how many wholeheartedly enjoyed the practice of mindfulness. But certainly, the ratio of Chung Tai lay followers versus Chung Tai monastics that exists in the wider Chung Tai community, seems to tell us how few people are willing to, or are indeed capable of, taking up such a strict lifestyle. In other words, the monastic lifestyle can be said to be limited to a small subset of practitioners who are highly determined to start with and consider themselves to have a natural disposition almost like a 'gift' for it.

Having said that, there is no guarantee that even the most committed monastic practitioner would stay for the rest of his/her life in the monastery. Some of those who have left Chung Tai switched their affiliation to other monasteries or set up their own meditation centres outside Chung Tai. Others opted out to live in seclusion rather than living in a monastic environment where they had to share with others and live confined by rules. For some, the long years of physical labour in the monastery had overwhelmed their health and they needed to recuperate alone. And there were even cases whereby monastic members had to be expelled by the monastery due to some serious offense. However, the statistics on dropout rates of monastic members are rather elusive, and it is fair to say that the monastic life in Chan monasteries is challenging for anyone that even a seasoned practitioner would have considered leaving at some point in his/her monastic life.

The public accessibility of the mindfulness tradition in the life of Chan monastic members, is limited not only by the innate difficulty of monastic life, but also dictated by these Chan monasteries' varying approaches to the dissemination of their teachings and practices. Neither Chung Tai nor Yunmen has moved noticeably towards 'secularisation' or making any efforts to open up their monasteries by relaxing monastic rules to suit the lifestyle of lay

participants. And both institutions continue to uphold the dividing line between the lay and monastic roles. They are firm in their approach to protect the ‘authenticity’ of Chan teaching, which is reflected in the spiritual authority accorded to their respective Chan masters. This highlights the importance of monastic teachers in the tradition, not only as a source of knowledge, but also as a moral role model. However, it raises a general question as to how long can the tradition go on producing well-qualified teachers who are charismatic enough to hold the community together?

In a study of the Foguanshan Buddhist order of contemporary Taiwan, Chandler noted that ‘[u]ltimately [...] the long-term viability of Foguangshan will depend on the persistence of loyalty to and faith in Master Xingyun [Hsing-Yun] without the benefit of his immediate presence’.⁶⁵⁵ Similar statements would apply equally well to Chung Tai and Yunmen, as both monasteries have lost their charismatic Chan masters in recent years. In fact, I was told that some resident monastics had left these institutions following the passing of their masters, citing it as their reason. Although both of these new abbots have been selected and trained by the old masters, their leadership will clearly take some time to be accepted by all the resident members of their respective monastery.

Another important factor that I was reminded to consider by my Yunmen informants is that they appeared much more pessimistic about the current state of Chinese Buddhism, and their concern presented a sharp contrast to the popular image of Buddhist revival in Mainland China.⁶⁵⁶ Some of them lamented the passing of old generations of Buddhist teachers and cast their doubts on the newer generation of Buddhists if they had inherited the spirit of religious integrity from the previous generations and could reach the same level of their achievements. Many have witnessed radical social and economic change in Mainland China since its ‘opening

⁶⁵⁵ Chandler (2004, 42).

⁶⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion about the Buddhist revival in Chinese Buddhism, see Chandler (2006).

up’ in the late 1970s, and some members speak of an urgent need to adopt new methods for spreading the dharma, in response to the increasing number of lay followers as well as unprecedentedly higher education level of laity. One senior monk informant told me that, ‘we are now at the crossroad between the traditional and modern, and yet we do not know where to go’.⁶⁵⁷ This statement offers us a glimpse into the complexity of contemporary Chinese Buddhism, which reveals the gap that emerged within the tradition caused by the Cultural Revolution, not only in the effort to restore Buddhist material culture of China that has been destroyed, but also to repair and revive its spiritual heritage. More importantly, in any of their efforts, however, they need to be cautious and many Buddhists have to negotiate their position under the increasingly tightening religious policy of PRC.

Though the *yun-men-san-ju* (‘three phrases of Yunmen’) may offer Yunmen monastic members some clues about the principle of how to go with the modern flow without losing sight of the fundamentals, the quest for a suitable balance between tradition and modernity is ongoing – and has often involved looking at how Buddhism in Mainland China has been modernised by their counterparts in Taiwan. In 2017, for example, Yunmen monastery held *jushi xuexiu ban*, an intensive three-day Buddhist program exclusively for lay practitioners, after hearing how Chung Tai operates meditation classes for its lay members at some of its global branches. Their pioneering work has offered Yunmen a new platform for disseminating their traditional knowledge of mindfulness with lay followers in a modern and systematic way, rather than relying merely on ritual as they used to do in the past.

Concurrently, however, many monastic members of Yunmen exhibit ambivalent feelings towards Taiwanese Buddhism’s direction, and in particular, towards its dynamic synthesis of the old and the new. For example, a monk informant, who noticed during a visit that the hanging bell and board had disappeared from Chung Tai’s Chan meditation halls,

⁶⁵⁷ Fieldnote recorded in July 2016.

lamented that some elements of Chan tradition had ‘changed’ or been ‘lost’. His statement resonates with Chandler’s observation that the general tendency in reviving Buddhism in Mainland China is focused on the re-establishing of the formal tradition based on the literal interpretation of ‘inherited tradition’.⁶⁵⁸ On the other hand, adapting the forms of tradition is important in the eyes of Taiwanese Buddhist modernists, which they see as necessary to ‘regain the underlying spirit of genuine faith’.⁶⁵⁹

Due to the open nature of society in Taiwan, its religious traditions have developed without constraints and been affected by westernisation and globalisation. Chung Tai monastery, like any other large Taiwanese Buddhist organisations, has also been modernising its methods of disseminating Buddhist teaching through its many global branches, to the point that they have become far more sophisticated and diverse than Yunmen monastery in Mainland China. As a result, the Chung Tai’s version of mindfulness practice, especially in the way it was understood and taught by Ven. Wei-Chueh, has spread far beyond the walls of the monastery and entered the lives of his lay followers in other parts of the world. It is worth noting that Chung Tai long refused to endorse the distance-learning approach to studying dharma, either through broadcasting or via online, and remained insistent upon ‘person to person’ learning either at the headquarters or at its branches until the Covid-19 pandemic forced it to adopt online teaching. So in the last year, Chung Tai has started to embrace a new approach to instructing meditation at its overseas branches, utilising Zoom for educational purposes. In this respect, we are reminded that Chung Tai is still young at heart, and its Buddhist organisation is constantly adapting to changes in society and environment, and we can say that its future development and changes are worth observing.

Meanwhile, what hinders Chung Tai from opening up is its policy of self-protection,

⁶⁵⁸ Chandler (2006, 180).

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

and for this reason, the monastery has been much more conservative and closed compared to other large Buddhist organisations in Taiwan.⁶⁶⁰ Chung Tai regards the best environment for spiritual cultivation should be protected by stringent rules capable of safeguarding its members from any potential interference or temptation from the outside world. Generally speaking, it is their view that there should be a clear boundary between the secular and the monastic, as well as between insiders and outsiders as the result, the boundary between insider and outsider is difficult to cross. For Chung Tai, the separation from society is to ensure ‘a pure environment for learning dharma’ and it is essential to protect their resident members from potential ‘bad influences’ or ‘wrong’ understandings of Buddhism that outsiders may introduce. In this respect, it has been difficult for researchers from outside Chung Tai to conduct fieldwork.

In the same token, every monastic member affiliated with Chung Tai is strictly instructed to be cautious about his/her words and behaviour as each of them is seen to perpetuate the image of Chung Tai to the outside world; and thus, any dharma activities performed by members in its branches, or any member conducting a Buddhist activity as an individual in public, need to be scrutinised beforehand by senior members at the Chung Tai headquarters. Therefore, Chung Tai’s innovative architectural appearance and its modern monastic organisation may contrast sharply with the very conservative and traditional spirit of the everyday lives its members are encouraged to lead. Arguably, its insistence upon its members cloistering themselves away from the secular world attracts some people but repels others. Even as Chung Tai ambitiously attempts to communicate its deep insights about Buddhism to a wider audience through modern technology and various approaches, its strict and inflexible management policy represents a major barrier to that very effort to reach out.

In conclusion, whilst secular mindfulness has been criticised for its ‘distortion’ of

⁶⁶⁰ Chandler (2004, 44).

Buddhist mindfulness teaching,⁶⁶¹ it is still accessible and practiced by many people of other faiths and cultures around the world. In contrast, ‘mindfulness’ in Chinese Chan monasteries in this study, shows that it is practiced and transmitted within a rigid moral framework with a strong emphasis on self-discipline and epistemological enquiry, which may be beneficial to dedicated monastic practitioners, but hardly a perfect fit for those living in the contemporary world of cultural and religious diversity.

⁶⁶¹ Grossman and Van Dam (2011, 219). See also Chiesa (2013, 262-63) and Dreyfus (2011).

Chapter 7 Conclusions

This study began with a curiosity: the discrepancies between the contemporary secular ‘mindful revolution’ and Buddhist conceptualisations of mindfulness. Many scholars have explored the extent to which ‘classic and modern concepts and practices of mindfulness clash, converge, and influence each other, and what that exchange holds for the future’.⁶⁶² Kabat-Zinn insists that the secular version of mindfulness he promotes is in well accordance with dharma in Buddhism, but purged of cultural and ritual baggage.⁶⁶³ Others such as Purser and his colleagues, however, have criticised what they call the ‘diluted’ character of secular mindfulness in both form and meaning of contemplative experiences, and proposed that the contemporary understanding of mindfulness should be framed around more contextual and cultural values. They have stated that

[m]odern cultural translations of mindfulness practices have [...] excluded and downplayed the vast array of contextual and cultural mediated forms of understanding, considering such practices as ‘culturally laden forms of baggage.’ However, it is precisely this comprehensive and cultural framing of contemplative experience that provides the interpretative frameworks for guiding, making sense of, and enacting meditative insights on progress of the path of liberation.⁶⁶⁴

In the same vein, Kirmayer argues that ‘ignoring context means that we end up with a bland or blind approach to mindfulness that lacks the sensitivity to context that is the mark of wisdom’.⁶⁶⁵ My ethnographic study aims to respond to these critiques, and contributes to the ongoing debate over the ‘fullness’ of the mindfulness from the perspective of the Chinese Buddhist tradition by examining the practice within the richness of two Chan monasteries.

In this study, I have endeavoured to show that ‘mindfulness’ as an ancient teaching of Buddhism continues to be engaged in the traditional method today, incorporated as part of the

⁶⁶² Purser et al. (2016, v).

⁶⁶³ Kabat-Zinn (2011, 281) states, ‘MBSR and other mindfulness-based interventions be grounded in a “universal dharma” that is congruent with Buddhadharma but not constrained by its historical, cultural and religious manifestations associated with its counties of origin and their unique traditions.’

⁶⁶⁴ Purser et al. (ibid., xi).

⁶⁶⁵ Kirmayer (2015, 462).

collective monastic practice in Chan monasteries in Mainland China and Taiwan. *Zhengnian*, the concept of ‘right mindfulness’, is a term commonly used by everyone in Chan monasteries. However, for monastics, the meaning of mindfulness is still somehow abstract, broad, and self-explanatory. The majority of practitioners in monastic settings refer to this term on a daily basis, yet they rarely pause to consider what it actually means.

Mindfulness, in this context, can be defined as a practice of continuously guarding the mind to retain an ideal mental state that is conducive to – or even already in line with – the attainment of enlightenment. To some extent, Chinese Chan tradition can be seen as sharing the epistemological understanding of mindfulness with Theravāda Buddhism, rooted in the schema of the Noble Eightfold Path and the four foundations of mindfulness, to protect one’s mind from an unwholesome mental state. Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of mindfulness in these two monasteries is also shaped by a distinct Mahāyāna understanding of the human mind, which is driven by the goal of realising one’s ‘true’ nature. In other words, mindfulness in Chinese Chan tradition is closely associated with the full realisation of one’s ‘true’ mind as the outcome of eradication of all unwholesome and deluded states.

The practice of mindfulness can be divided into two levels; for a practitioner who is already enlightened and for one who is unenlightened. The former is regarded ‘effortless’, and the practice focuses on retaining the awakened state and staying firmly in one’s ‘true’ nature. For the unenlightened ones, the practice requires much efforts, constantly self-reflecting, protecting their minds from the intrusion of unwholesome thoughts, and have to eradicate their vexations by engaging with all kinds of meditative techniques, Buddhist teaching, and even various labour works if they are to see their ‘true’ minds and become enlightened.

Based on my finding in this study, most practitioners in these two Chan monasteries do not regard themselves as ‘enlightened’. They tend to learn to observe their mind, follow communal rules, and do everything well in daily monastic life as the practical means of

overcoming any of their unwholesome thoughts and vexations. Thus, for them, the practice of mindfulness in the context of Chan monasteries is not limited to a specific form such as meditation. The couplet hanging at the main gate of Yunmen's affiliated nunnery resonated with this view: 'While serving the tea to people, remain constantly in mindfulness'.⁶⁶⁶ Mindfulness could either mean diligent physical work with the spirit of no-self, or practice of self-awareness and non-attachment in the moment of dining. Mindfulness could mean the avoidance of desires during sleep or a harmonious and diligent mind in the chanting practice. In actual practices, a broad range of 'situational' interpretations and meanings of mindfulness are created with respect to various occasions one practitioner faces and reacts to.

This finding, based on the data collected in this dissertation's two focal monasteries, echoes Purser and colleagues' view that 'in many Buddhist schools and traditions, mindfulness has never been foregrounded or [... accorded] central status as a core practice'.⁶⁶⁷ Instead, it is quietly manifested within or practised alongside many other Buddhist teachings and ritual practices. This reflects the fact that, in the Chan monasteries I studied, 'mindfulness' serves as a fundamental principle for their monastic living, and cannot be narrowed down to a set of practices or instrumental techniques offered in an 'eight-week mindfulness' course in a secular context. Neither can 'mindfulness' be reduced to a simple practice for gaining 'attention' or enhancing 'concentration'. In other words, every effort in the daily myriad details of monastic life could be closely linked with the idea of mindfulness that guides their mind against greed, anger, and ignorance as air is to life, but just as invisible.

It can also be pointed out from my own experience that when I expressed my scholarly concerns about the secularisation of mindfulness happening in the West to my Chinese monk informants at Yunmen, they did not seem to be concerned at all. One of them just smiled and

⁶⁶⁶ Fieldnote recorded in July 2016.

⁶⁶⁷ Purser et al. (2016, xi).

gently commented that, ‘What they have found is just an illusory self’.⁶⁶⁸ A nun informant, who first refused to answer my question of what mindfulness was for her, said that Buddhism is like a glass of water: One can only understand it by drinking it instead of talking about it. She even told me that simply writing out the *yun-men-san-ju* (the ‘three phrases of Yunmen’) would be a sufficient answer to my research question and that I should submit it as my dissertation.⁶⁶⁹ In short, it seemed to me that ‘mindfulness’ was not promoted nor defended anywhere near as passionately by these Chan practitioners as the advocates of its secular variant.

Based on participation observation and ethnographic data collected at two Chan monasteries on opposite sides of the Taiwan Strait, I have endeavoured to make an original contribution to the scholarly understanding of mindfulness in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. In Chapter 2, I showed how local knowledge of mindfulness in these two monasteries was passed down from prominent Chan masters to their disciples in the lineage, indicating the very high expectations around the teaching of this concept in the Chan tradition. This is because that the concept of ‘mindfulness’ contains much more than a mere breathing technique or a skill to concentrate, and to monastic practitioners, it is seen as a path towards enlightenment, assuring a full liberation from the cycle of rebirth, not to mention a critical component of the state of enlightenment itself. As McRae has highlighted, the core feature of the mind-to-mind transmission in Chan Buddhism is actually ‘nothing’ to be transmitted, but an approval and mutual exchanges of enlightened experiences between master and disciple.⁶⁷⁰ Therefore, monastic students expect their master to have a very high level of Buddhist doctrinal knowledge, and even more importantly, to be spiritually worthy in his personal practice, and

⁶⁶⁸ The monk informant felt that the Western secular mindfulness is a way to help people with busy life to relax and calm down, yet the ‘self’ that the approach discovers is different to that found in Chan Buddhism. He thinks that the self found in the secular mindfulness is an illusive and a conditioned state of self-like shadows reflected by light. What Chan Buddhism talks about is an awareness that removes all of these (emotions) and leaves the original nature (fieldnote recorded in July 2016).

⁶⁶⁹ Fieldnote recorded in July 2016.

⁶⁷⁰ McRae (2003, 6).

ideally, to have fully enlightened. Monastic students living with their Chan master in monasteries, observe and learn about how to practice mindfulness in their daily life, and can also receive prompt in-person guidance from the master. This contrasts sharply with how ‘mindfulness’ is taught in secular circles outside the confinement of Buddhist monasteries. As Wilson notes, the traditional mode of ‘face-to-face apprenticeships under Buddhist monks’ is no longer tenable in the modern world and is disappearing in secular contexts, as ‘mindfulness’ is steadily being transformed into type of a remedial tool sold by meditation instructors.⁶⁷¹

The life trajectories of the three Chan masters discussed in this study clearly indicate that none of them originally intended to become a spiritual authority. Rather, they were seen as such by people who came across them because they demonstrated remarkable wisdom, a special ability for entering deep meditative states, solid moral discipline, a strong capacity to endure sufferings, and deep compassion. Indeed, their life stories reveal a causal relationship between mindfulness and suffering. That is, the practice of mindfulness is believed to equip the mind with resilience against life’s many setbacks, whether minor or catastrophic. Conversely, the road to mindfulness can be said to be filled with hardship in itself, which Ven. Foyuan has compared to one person battling with thousands of rivals.⁶⁷² Obviously, such a deep mental realisation cannot be achieved in a state of pleasure or indulgence. Therefore, through many decades of living with and teaching disciples, Chan masters’ words and life experiences gradually accumulate as exemplars of mindfulness, becoming shared mottos and fostering a specific religious atmosphere. It is in part for this reason that the influence of their charismatic personalities and idealised images outlives their physical bodies and life.

The findings set forth in Chapter 3, regarding the moral context in which mindfulness practices are cultivated, resonate with Bhikkhu Anālayo’s view that ‘mindfulness derives its

⁶⁷¹ Wilson (2016, 118).

⁶⁷² Yunmen Monastery (2014a, 354).

ethical dimension from the context within which it is cultivated'.⁶⁷³ A specific awareness of Buddhist morality is cultivated in the context of these Chan monasteries, which is done by members adhering to all kinds of moral regulations and discipline in the community, which include the observance of Buddhist precepts, ancient monastic rules of purity, and a more modern regulations aimed at ensuring harmonious communal living. An institutional emphasis on individual moral responsibility, reflected in the monastic identity-construction process, highlights that the Chan practice — from the very beginning of one's monastic career — is grounded in a sense of strong moral awareness. Such strictures permeate every aspect of their monastic life and guide members to distinguish between what is conducive to the achievement of enlightenment and what is harmful to and obstructed it. In fact, my data makes it clear that in the Chan context, practising mindfulness is established through, and tightly bound up with, very careful and clear moral discipline cultivated in their monastic community. In the absence of such a moral framework, any attempts to practice mindfulness would be seen as meaningless and hollow in the eyes of Chan practitioners at Yunmen and Chung Tai alike.

In Chapter 4, I have attempted to demonstrate how mindfulness practices are grounded in a carefully routinised communal lifestyle in Chan monasteries. A close bond amongst members is created through their sharing of food, living space, collective labour, and most importantly, in their spiritual aspiration and belief in the path towards enlightenment. In their monastic environment, Chan monastics constantly encourage and help each other to maintain mindfulness in every aspect of their daily life. As Kuan suggests, mindfulness serves as a protection for one's cultivation, and this, in turn, also protects others' cultivation and growth.⁶⁷⁴ It would thus seem that their state of mindfulness is energised and cultivated through being with other practitioners in a tightly knit collectivity, even if the individual practice *per se* is

⁶⁷³ Bhikkhu Anālayo (2018, 33-49).

⁶⁷⁴ Krägeloh (2018, 90).

ultimately not a collective one.

In the same vein, Chapter 5 illustrates how the individual quest for enlightenment is built upon a complex web of relational support by drawing the cases of Chan meditative retreats. The norms and rules that comprise the communal organisation and meditation practices in Chan monasteries provide highly detailed and varied guidelines, ranging from the recommended practice of breathing methods to the mental phenomena conducive to fulfilling the religious goal of becoming aware of one's true nature. In Chapter 6, I put forward an argument explaining the dynamics of morality-mindfulness-enlightenment in Chan monastic communities and discussed the commonalities and divergences in their monastic practices between Taiwan and Mainland China.

7.1 Limitations

This study of the purposes, motivations, and practices of mindfulness in two contemporary Chan monasteries in Taiwan and Mainland China has been presented with several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the findings of case-study research are not necessarily generalisable; that is, my findings should not be assumed to represent the generality of the lived experiences of monastic members in every other Chan monastery in Mainland China and Taiwan today, let alone those in other parts of the world and/or adhering to other Buddhist traditions of the world.

Secondly, my case studies offer a first-hand account of the 'lived reality' and 'actual practices' in Chan monastic life, based on close observation of practitioners' experiences in the Buddhist monastic community. Yet, no matter how detailed the information my informants have provided me with, it could never be sufficient to fully represent the variances of individual practices. Even at Chung Tai, a highly regimented monastery with a strong emphasis on standardisation, consistency and unity, each person's practices and attitudes towards their Chan practices are dissimilar. At Yunmen, meanwhile, such variation is compounded by the fact that

its monastic members come from a wide range of Buddhist lineages and institutions spread across many regions in Mainland China. Moreover, even within just one person's cultivation journey, considerable changes can occur over time, and therefore my several years spend on fieldwork can only produce 'snapshots' of many complex spiritual journeys that last sometimes over many decades.

Thirdly, my investigation of the triple-platform ordination and *chanqi* in Chapters 3 and 4 was limited by the fact that my data collected at Yunmen were mainly focused on nuns' practices, since – being a nun myself – I was not allowed any direct access to the monks' practices, and I had to rely on a distant observation and hearsay evidence for the latter participants. Nevertheless, I was told that the ritual formalities between these two groups were essentially alike. Similarly, there may be gaps in my data arising from the religious requirement, which obliged myself to maintain a certain distance from my monk informants, both physically and emotionally. Certainly, it would have been more fruitful to study the monastic lives of both female and male members at Yunmen, since my fieldwork observations in Mainland China pointed to a considerably greater gender-based difference in the experiences of monastic status, career opportunities, and institutional support than was the case in Taiwan. For the above-mentioned reasons, I had little opportunity to compare male and female monastics' respective relationships with the outside world. That being said, however, a male researcher would undoubtedly have encountered many or all of the similar gender-related problems that I did.

Lastly, my decision to use an auto-ethnographic approach to the study of Chung Tai Chan Monastery was shaped in part by the nature and policies of that monastic community being very protective to their members from outside disturbance. Thus, my returning to the monastery for the purpose of conducting interviews with its current members was almost impossible.⁶⁷⁵ This meant that the information I drew from, while valid, were mostly based on

⁶⁷⁵ Based on the idea of protecting the Chung Tai monastic members from unnecessary disturbance, the

my knowledge, experiences, and perspectives as an insider of that monastery from more than eight years ago.⁶⁷⁶

7.2 Future research directions

Due to time and financial restraints, this study has mainly focused on the monastic communities inside their walls, and has not explored their interactions and relationships with lay donors or society at large. Therefore, it might be fruitful for future research to examine the social challenges that monastics in Mainland China and Taiwan face, which in turn can shape their Chan practices. Secondly, because the samples used in this study were relatively small, it will be worthwhile to extend its research to a wider range of monastic institutions and organisations in regions beyond Mainland China and Taiwan, as a means of obtaining a fuller and richer understanding of contemporary Chan monastic practice. Thirdly, as Kabat-Zinn's secular mindfulness is known to have been influenced by the Chan, Zen, and Son traditions,⁶⁷⁷ future research could investigate and illuminate the extent and proportion of these wider influences. Lastly, I hope that the present study will, by example, encourage further richly detailed research on how 'mindfulness' is practised in many different traditions and cultural contexts.

monastery discourages its members against forming any contacts with any monastics who have withdrawn from the community.

⁶⁷⁶ I had some opportunities to chat with some lay people and a few monastic members. They commented that life in Chung Tai has been 'pretty much the same' except for two points: First, Chung Tai has undertaken a series of construction projects, including remodelling the Chung Tai Buddhist Institute for Nuns and building a new large-scaled meditation hall and extra dormitories; Second, they believe that the rules of the monastery have become more stringent.

⁶⁷⁷ Kabat-Zinn (2011, 289).

Glossary

- Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海
ban 班
banghe 棒喝
banshou shifu 班首師父
baoren 保任
ben-lai-mian-mu 本來面目
ben-xin-ben-xing 本心本性
benfa 本法
bu-hao-yi-si 不好意思
bujingguan 不淨觀
busa 布薩
can-huatou 參話頭
Cen Xuelü 岑學呂
changzhu 常住
chanhuitang 懺悔堂
Chanlin Baoxun 禪林寶訓
Chanlin Xiangqi Jian 禪林象器箋
Chanyuan Zhuquan Jidou Xu 禪源諸詮集都序
changzhuwu 常住物
chanmo 懺摩
chanqi 禪七
chansi 禪寺
chantang 禪堂
Chanyuan Qinggui 禪苑清規
chanzong daochang 禪宗道場
chengnianli 成年禮
Chixiu Baizhang Qinggui 敕修百丈清規
chuangliao 闖寮
chuanjie 傳戒
Chuanjie Zhengfan 傳戒正範
chuanxiang 喘相
chuchen 觸塵
chujia 出家
Chung Tai Koan 中台公案
Cibeiguan 慈悲觀
conglin 叢林
Dafangbianfobaoen Jing 大方便佛報恩經
dangzhi 當值
dasheng chan 大乘禪
Daxue 大學
dayi 大衣
dazhangfu 大丈夫

dengtan 登壇
 diandao 顛倒
 dingke 定課
 dingzibu 丁字步
Douxing Changming 斗星長明
Erkehejie 二課合解
 fachen 法塵
 fadayuan 發大願
Fahua Yishu 法華義疏
 fahui 法會
 fajuan 法卷
 fanan 法難
 fanfu chan 凡夫禪
 fangsheng 放生
 fannao 煩惱
Fanwang jing 梵網經
 fashen 法身
 fashi 法師
 Feng Huanzhen 馮煥珍
 fengxiang 風相
Fohai Xunyu 佛海尋源
 foqi 佛七
 foxing 佛性
 foxueyuan 佛學院
Foyuan Laohe 佛源老和尚法匯
Foyuan Miaoxin Chanshi Chanyao 佛源妙心禪師禪要
 Fuyang Si 福嚴寺
 gan-huo-er 幹活兒
 Gaomin Si 高旻寺
 gei-tang-chi 給糖吃
 gen-qi-bu-hao 根器不好
 gongyangji 供養偈
 Guangxiao Si 光孝寺
 Guanyin 觀音
Guishan Jingce 為山警策
 Guishan Lingyou 為山靈祐
 Guoen Si 國恩寺
 guotang 過堂
Guzunsu Yulu 古尊宿語錄
 haiqing 海青
 han-gai-qian-kun 函蓋乾坤
 heheju 和合具
 Hengyang 衡陽
 huatou 話頭

huayuan 化緣
huifu qingjing 回復清淨
huimingpai 慧命牌
Huineng 惠能
hunchen 昏沈
hunian 護念
jian-xing-cheng-fo 見性成佛
jianshi xin 堅實心
jianxiang 監香
Jianzhu zhengnian suishun juexing 堅住正念 隨順覺性
Jiaoshan 焦山
Jiashe Moteng 迦葉摩騰
jiaxing 加行
jie-duan-zhong-liu 截斷眾流
jieba 戒疤
jiechang 戒場
jiechi 戒尺
jiedie 戒碟
jiejie 結界
jieti 戒體
jiezhang 戒障
jiezi 戒子
Jingde Chuandeng Lu 景德傳燈錄
Jinghui Si 淨慧寺
jingjie 境界
Jinshan Si 金山寺
jiqu xin 集起心
jixiangwo 吉祥臥
Jizu 雞足
ju 具
jue-de-jiao-yu 覺的教育
juecha 覺察
juewu 覺悟
juexing 覺性
juezhao 覺照
jushi xuexiu ban 居士學修班
juzujie 具足戒
kaishi 開示
kaiwu 開悟
kaogong 考功
Keelung Shifang Dajue Chansi 基隆十方大覺禪寺
ketang 客堂
kufang 庫房
Li Bing-nan 李炳南

Li Hanhun 李漢魂
Li Jishen 李濟深
li-he-tong-jun 利和同均
ling-zhi-ling-jue 靈知靈覺
Lingquan Si 靈泉寺
Lingshan Si 靈山寺
Lingyin Si 靈隱寺
Linji 臨濟
litongxiao 禮通宵
liu-genben-fannao 六根本煩惱
liuhejing 六和敬
liujifo 六即佛
Liurong Si 六榕寺
Liuzu Si 六祖寺
luzui chanhui 露罪懺悔
miaochan xingxue 廟產興學
ming 明
ming-xin-jian-xing 明心見性
mofa 末法
muyu 木魚
Nan Huaijin 南懷瑾
Nanhua Si 南華寺
Nantai Si 南台寺
nian 念
Nianchujing 念處經
nianfo 念佛
Nianpu 年譜
nongchan 農禪
Pini Riyong 毗尼日用
Pini Riyong Lu 毗尼日用錄
Pini Zuochi Xushi 毗尼作持續釋
pufo 普佛
Puguang Jingshe 普光精舍
Putuo 普陀
qi 起
qi-ni 七逆
qi-niu-gui-jia 騎牛歸家
Qianfota Si 千佛塔寺
qingming 清明
Qixia Si 棲霞寺
qixiang 氣相
qixin xiudao 棲心修道
qiyi 七衣
qizheng 七證

Qu Junxiong 瞿俊雄
 randing fayuan 燃頂發願
 renjian fojiao 人間佛教
 routuan xin 肉團心
 ru-seng-bao-shu 入僧寶數
 rulai qingjing chan 如來清淨禪
 Ruyuan 乳源
 samādhi 三摩地
 sanshi 三師
 santan dajie 三壇大戒
 sechen 色塵
 Sengcan 僧璨
 sengzhi 僧值
 Shami Luyi Yaolue 沙彌律儀要略
 Shami Luyi Yaolue Shuyi 沙彌律儀要略述義
 shangtang shuofa 上堂說法
 Shanqing 善卿
 shelizi 舍利子
 shengchen 聲塵
 shi-e 十惡
 shifang seng 十方僧
 shiniutu 十牛圖
 shixiongdi 師兄弟
 shou-she-liu-gen 收攝六根
 shuxi guan 數息觀
 si 死
 si-genben 四根本
 si-zhong-qing-jing-ming-hui 四種清淨明誨
 sida tangkou 四大堂口
 Sifen Lü 四分律
 Shanjian Lü Piposha 善見律毘婆沙
 Sifen Lü Shanbu Suiji Jiemo 四分律刪補隨機羯磨疏
 Sifen Lü Shanfan Buque Xingshi Chao 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔
 sinianchu 四念處
 sui-bo-zhu-lang 隨波逐浪
 suizhong 隨眾
 Taiwan qiang 台灣腔
 Tanzhou Guishan Lingyou Chanshi Yulu 潭州為山靈祐禪師語錄
 tidu fengbo 剃度風波
 Tongjielu 同戒錄
 toutuo 頭陀
 tugai 土改
 Ven. Changlian 昌蓮法師
 Ven. Chuanfa 傳法法師

Ven. Daoan 道安法師
 Ven. Deshan Yuanming 德山圓明法師
 Ven. Dongyang Dehui 東陽德輝禪師
 Ven. Duti Jianyue 讀體見月律師
 Ven. Foyuan 佛源老和尚
 Ven. Furen 復仁法師
 Ven. Guo-Jun 果峻法師
 Ven. Hsing-Yun 星雲法師
 Ven. Huangbo Xiyun 黃檗希運禪師
 Ven. Hui-Lü 慧律法師
 Ven. Jian-Mai 見脈法師
 Ven. Jian-Ying 見應法師
 Ven. Jiantan 見曇法師
 Ven. Jiexian 戒顯法師
 Ven. Jinghui 淨慧法師
 Ven. Juxing 具行法師
 Ven. Laiguo 來果禪師
 Ven. Lingyuan 靈源老和尚
 Ven. Mingcan 明參法師
 Ven. Mingjing 明靜法師
 Ven. Mingkong 明空法師
 Ven. Sheng-Yan 聖嚴法師
 Ven. Taixu 太虛法師
 Ven. Wei-Chueh 惟覺老和尚
 Ven. Wuxing 悟行法師
 Ven. Xingguo 性國法師
 Ven. Xingqi 性祇法師
 Ven. Xuyun 虛雲老和尚
 Ven. Yicheng 一誠老和尚
 Ven. Yingang 印剛法師
 Ven. Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽禪師
 Ven. Zhenqing 鎮清法師
 Ven. Zhihui 智暉法師
 Ven. Zhuhong 株宏大師
 waidao chan 外道禪
 wangxiang 妄想
 Wanli 萬里
 weichen 味塵
 weinuo 維那
 Weituo 韋馱
 weiyi 威儀
 Wenyan 文偃
 wu 悟
 wu-hou-qi-xiu-fang-shi-zhen-xiu 悟後起修方是真修

wu-ting-xin-guan 五停心觀
wuguantang 五觀堂
wuji 無記
wuliao 無聊
wunian 無念
Wutai 五台
wutang gongke 五堂功課
wuyi 五衣
Wuzhuo Daozhong 無著道忠
Xi Jinping 習近平
xiangban 香板
xiangchen 香塵
xiaomiao 小廟
xiaosheng chan 小乘禪
xiaosheng xintai 小乘心態
Xiaoxitian 小西天
xienian 邪念
xin 心
Xinfuzhu 心賦注
xing 星
xingjiao 行腳
xingxiang 行香
xinxing 心性
Xinxinming 信心銘
xiqi 習氣
xizhang 錫杖
Xiuxi Zhiguan Zuochan Fayao 修行止觀坐禪法要
xiuxing 修行
xuanfochang 選佛場
Xuyun Heshang Quanji 虛雲和尚全集
Xuyun Heshang Zhuanji 虛雲和尚傳記
Xuyun Laoeshang Chanqi Kaishilu 虛雲老和尚禪七開示錄
yao 耀
yi-zhi-hao-xiang 一支好香
yiboliao 衣鉢寮
yinli shifu 引禮師父
yinqing 引磬
Yinshui Siyuan 飲水思源
Yiyang 益陽
Yongjia Zhengdaoge 永嘉證道歌
Yongquan Si (Yongquan Monastery) 湧泉寺
Yongzheng 雍正
Yuan Huanxian 袁煥仙
yuanlü xin 緣慮心

yufo 浴佛
 yulanpen 盂蘭盆
Yulanpen Jing 盂蘭盆經
 yulu 語錄
 yun-men-san-ju 雲門三句
Yunqi Fahui 雲棲法彙
Yunmen Shanzhi 雲門山志
 Yunmen Si (Yunmen Shan Dajue Chansi) 雲門寺 (雲門山大覺禪寺)
Yunju Yigui 雲居儀規
Yuxuan Yulu 御選語錄
 Zengzi 曾子
 Zhaijiao 齋教
Zhaomu Kesong 朝暮課誦
 zheng-nian-zheng-xin yang-chu-da-wu-wei-jing-shen du-ren-du-shi 正念正心 養出大無畏
 精神 度人度世
 Zhaozhou 趙州
 zhengnian 正念
 zhengnian lianxi 正念練習
 zhengqi 正氣
 zhenru 真如
 Zhenru Si 真如寺
 zhi 知
 zhongdao shixiang guan 中道實相觀
 zhonghua fojiao wenhuaguan 中華佛教文化館
 Zhongnan 終南
 Zhu Falan 竺法蘭
 zhuan-shi-cheng-zhi 轉識成智
 zhuqi heshang 主七和尚
 Zhusheng Si 祝聖寺
 zixing 自性
Zongjing Lu 宗鏡錄
 Zongmi 宗密
 zuochan 坐禪
 zuoxiang 坐香
 zushi chan 祖師禪
Zutingshiyuan 祖庭事苑

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Appendix 1: Photos

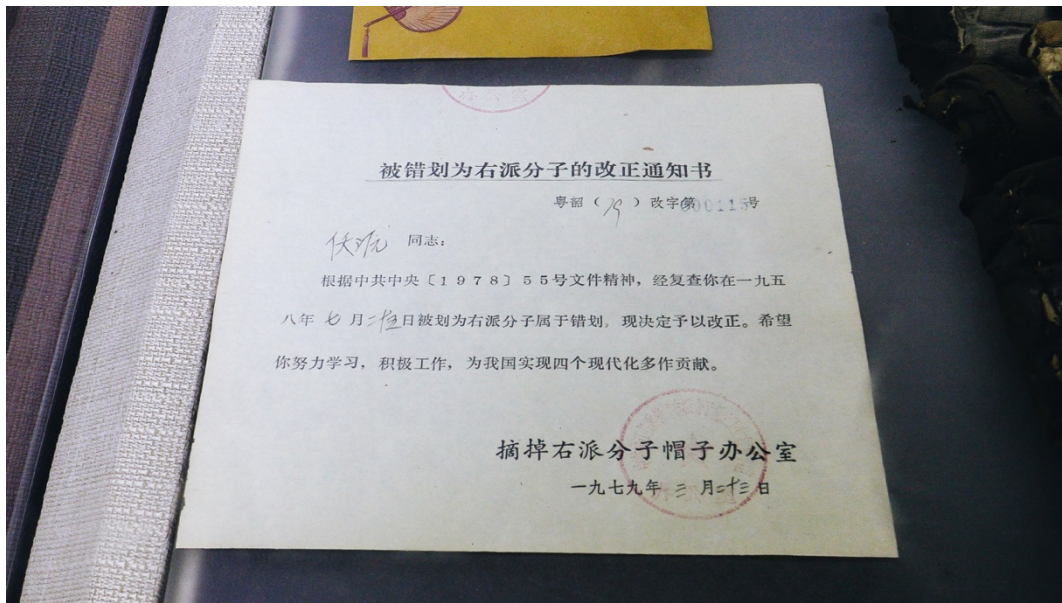


Photo 1: An official government notice, dated 23 March 1979, admitting that it had been a mistake to classify Ven. Foyuan as a rightist on 25 July 1957 and announcing his rehabilitation. This document is displayed in Ven. Foyuan's memorial hall at Yunmen Monastery. Photographed by the author in 2016.



Photo 2: A monk mentor (centre, facing left) correcting monk ordinands' deportment at Chung Tai Chan Monastery, 2008. Source: Chung Tai Tongjielu (2008)



Photo 3: Lay donors kneel on the floor as they make offerings to ordinands at Chung Tai Chan Monastery. Source: Chung Tai Tongjielu (2008)



Photo 4: Herbal medicine for sick ordinands cooked by a nun ordinand who was a doctor. The soups (from left to right) were for cough relief; flu with white phlegm; flu with sweating and yellow phlegm; and eczema. Photographed by the author in 2019.



Photo 5: Ordinands prostrate in front of preceptors and witnesses to show the highest respect and welcome them to an ordination ceremony. Source: Chung Tai Tongjielu (2005).



Photo 6: All nun preceptors and witnesses bowing to one another in a circle (*heheju*) on the ordination platform. Source: Chung Tai Tongjielu (2005).



Photo 7: The spatial reflection of hierarchy in a dual ordination ceremony: Monk preceptors sit on the higher level and nun preceptors on the lower. The three ordinands are undergoing the process of *dengtan* at Chung Tai Chan Monastery, 2005. Source: Chung Tai Tongjielu (2005)



Photo 8: As compared to Chung Tai, physical deportment lessons at Yunmen were relatively lenient and conducted in a more joyful atmosphere. These 700 nun ordinands, photographed by the author in 2019, were learning the correct way of standing, kneeling, and making full bows in their long robes. Photographed by the author in 2019.



Photo 9: The main preceptor, Ven. Wei-Chueh, lights the cone during a *randing* ritual at Chung Tai Chan Monastery. Source: Chung Tai Tongjielu (2005)

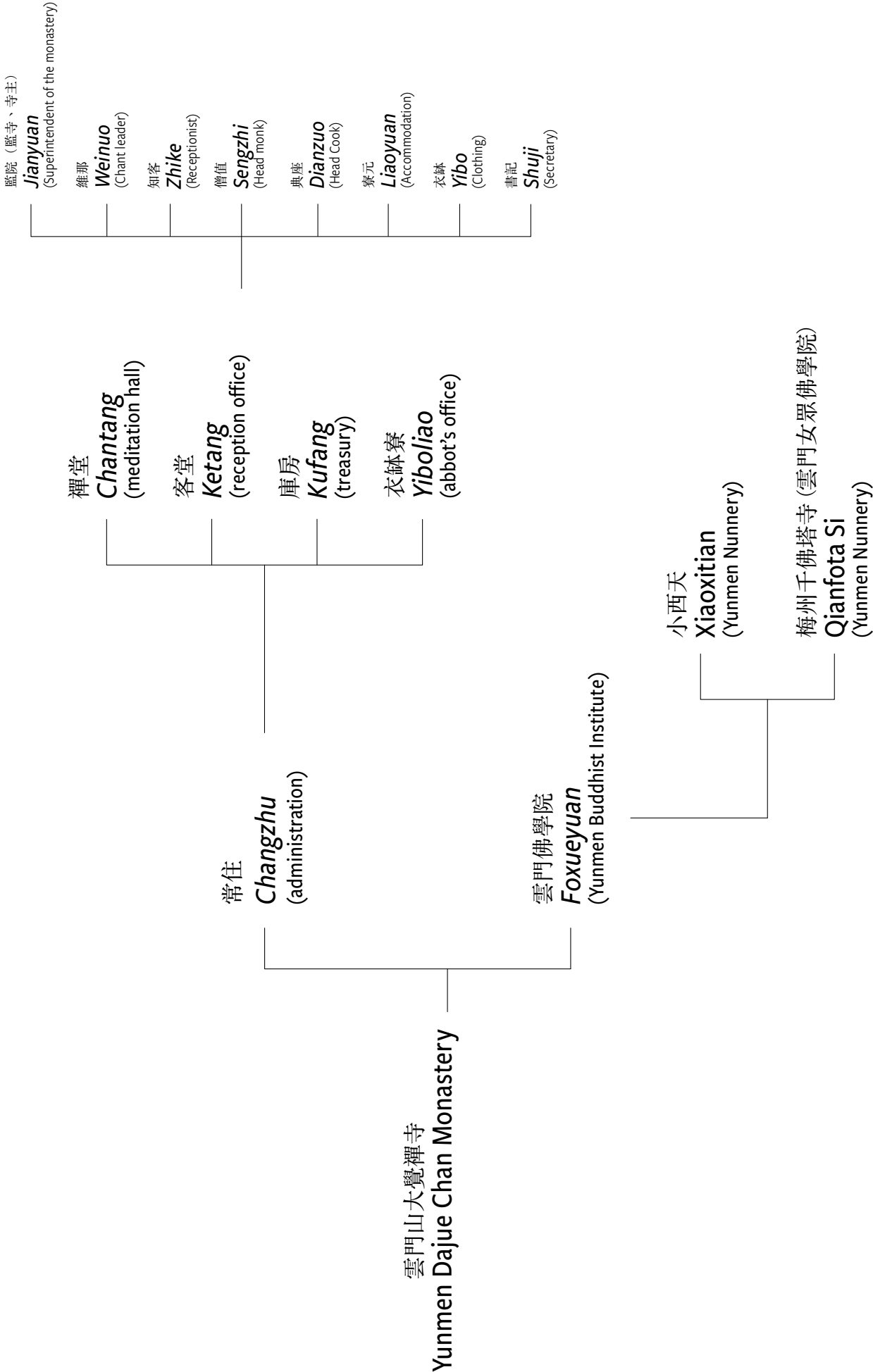


Photo 10: Meditation hall of Yunmen's nunnery. Photographed by the author in 2018.



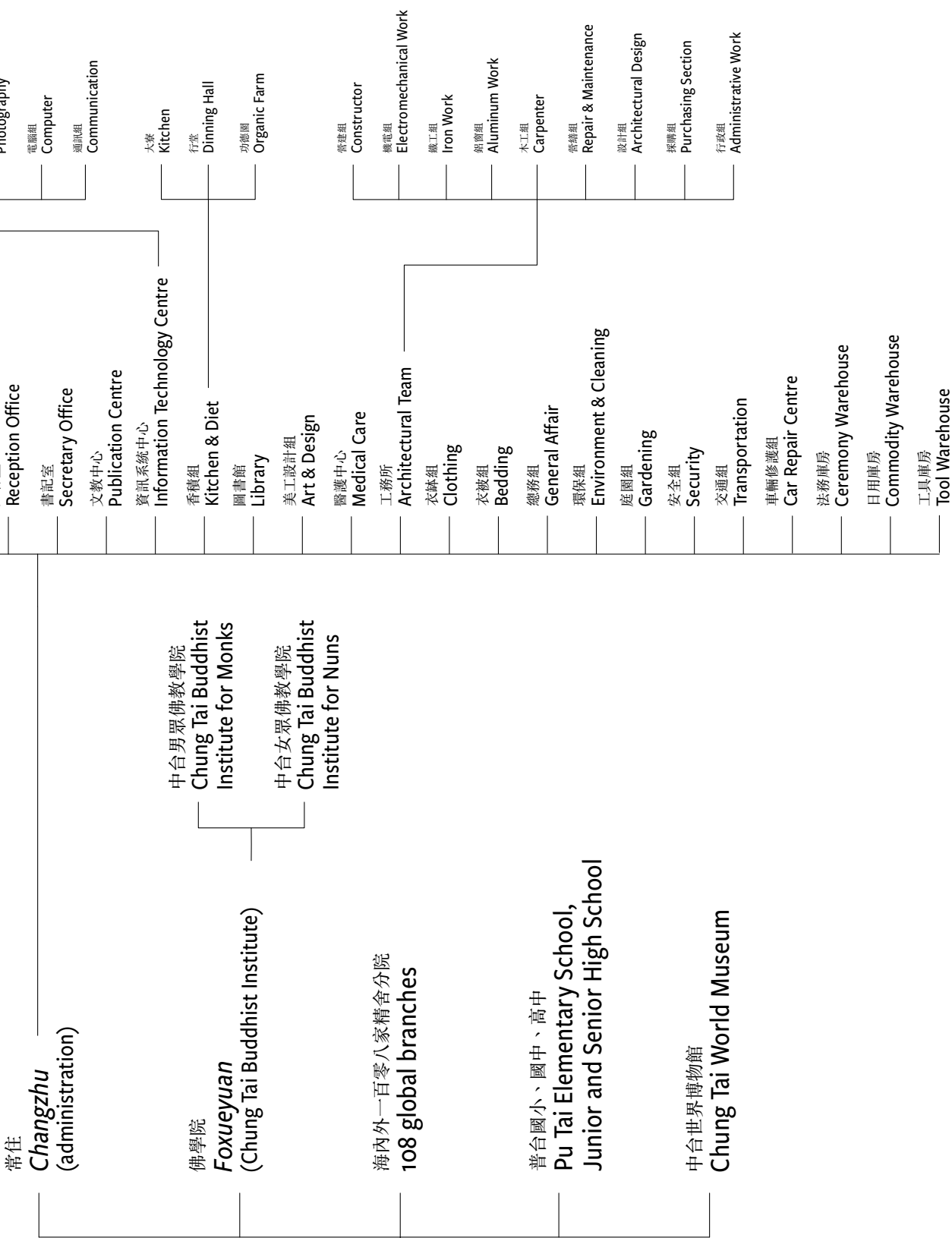
Photo 11: Each monastic regularly receives bookmark tickets during morning chanting and dining rituals. The different colours represent different amount of money. On a fixed date every month, monastics visit the reception office to exchange these for money. Photographed by the author in 2019.

Appendix Two: Organisation Charts of Yunmen and Chung Tai



中台禪寺

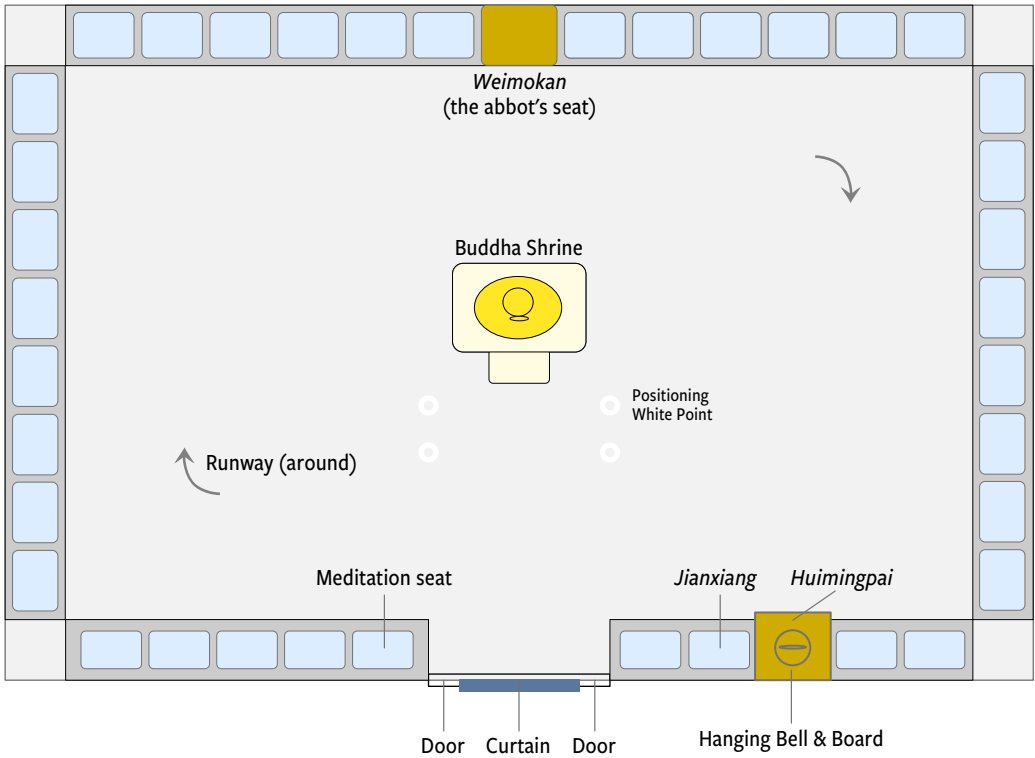
Chung Tai Chan Monastery



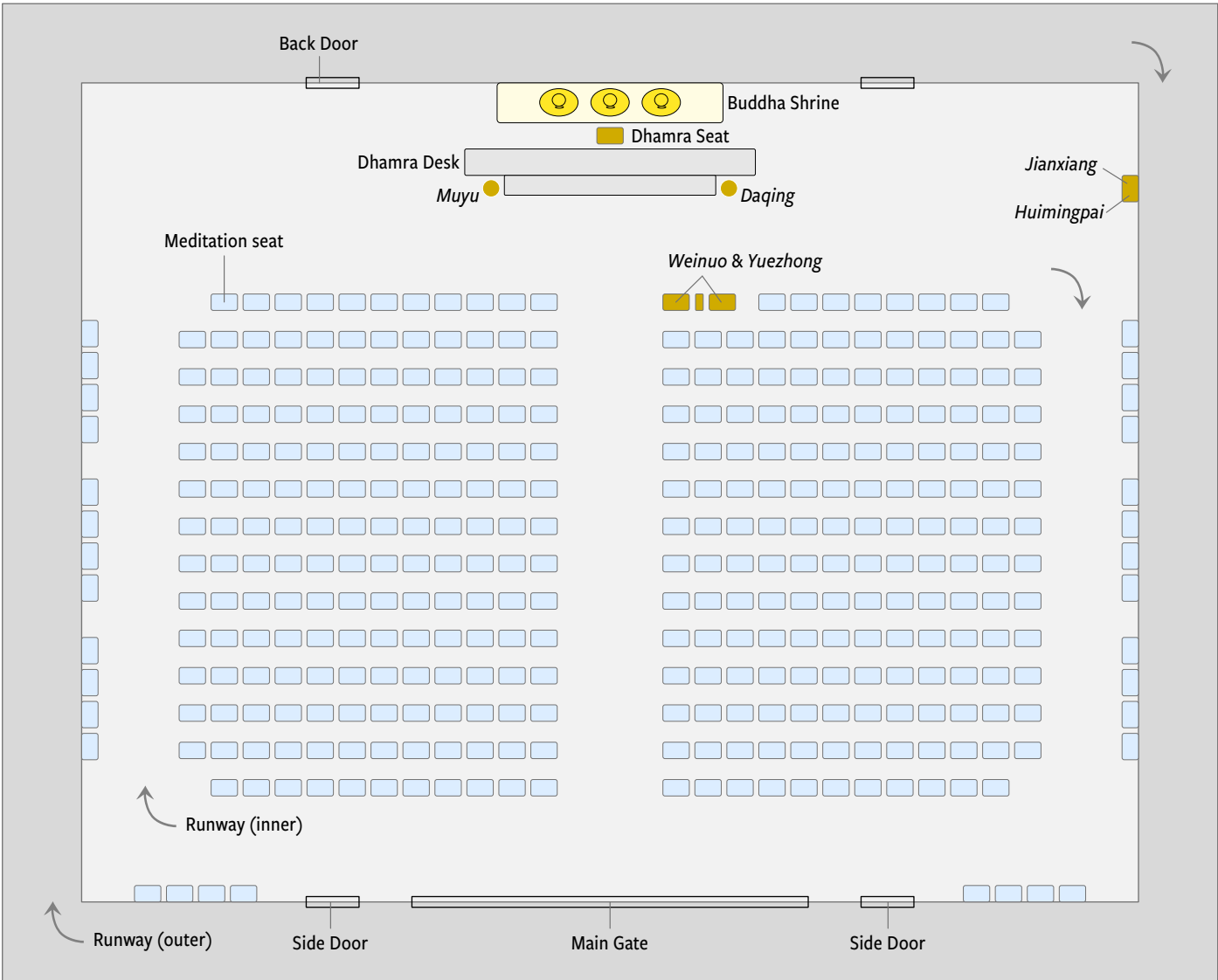
Appendix Three: Chung Tai's Foundations

1. Chung Tai Cultural Educational Foundation 財團法人中台文教基金會 (since 1991)
 - Publishing books and journals
2. Chung Tai Chan Association 社團法人中華民國中台禪會 (since 1991)
 - Conducting meditation seminars and meditation activities
3. Chung Tai Shan Buddhist Foundation 財團法人中台山佛教基金會 (since 1996)
 - Promoting Buddhism and meditation activities
 - Organising social charity projects
4. Chinese Century Buddhism Association 社團法人中國世紀佛教協進會 (since 1999)
 - Holding all kinds of Buddhist activities
5. Chung Tai Art and Culture Foundation 財團法人中台文化藝術基金會 (since 2009)
 - Operating Chung Tai World Museum
 - Preserving and restoring of historical and cultural assets
 - Organising arts and cultural activities
 - Promoting cross-strait cultural exchange

Appendix Four: Layout of Meditation Halls



Yunmen's Meditation Hall



Chung Tai's Meditation Hall